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TRAINING PARENTS OF WASHINGTON HEIGHTS BAPTIST
CHURCH IN DAYTON, OHIO, TO BE THE PRIMARY
DISCIPLERS OF THEIR FAMILIES

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TRAINING PARENTS OF WASHINGTON HEIGHTS BAPTIST
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To my own little flock: Leah, Clara, and Baker.

They are the ones who shepherd me as I shepherd them as God shepherds us.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	3
Purpose	5
Goals	5
Research Methodology	6
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	7
Conclusion	10
2. GOD’S INSTRUCTIONS FOR FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP	11
Deuteronomy 6:4-9: Foundations of Family Discipleship	11
Ephesians 6:1-4: Paul’s Post-Crucifixion Support of Family Discipleship	21
Joshua 24 and Psalm 78: Two Examples of God’s Ordination of Family Discipleship	29
Conclusion	37
3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY AND CHURCH	38
Ecclesial Responsibility for Family Ministry	38
Parental Responsibility for Family Discipleship	47
The Practice of Family Worship	51

Chapter	Page
4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT	57
Introduction	57
Stage 1	57
Stage 2	61
Stage 3	70
Conclusion	71
5. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION	72
Introduction	72
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose	72
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals	73
Strengths of the Project	80
Weaknesses of the Project	82
What I Would Do Differently	83
Theological Reflections	85
Personal Reflections	87
Conclusion	89
 Appendix	
1. FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES SURVEY	90
2. FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC	95
3. FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM	97
4. RESULTS FROM PRE- AND POST-SURVEYS	128
BIBLIOGRAPHY	131

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Rubric scores for biblical content	76
2. Rubric scores for practicality	77
3. Statistical results for survey subsections	80
A1. Family Discipleship Perceptions scores	129
A2. Family Discipleship Practices scores	130

PREFACE

I will have completed this project only because I do not exist in a relationship vacuum. Without the help, love, patience, encouragement, lodging, prodding, and dear embraces of those around me, I would still be in the library.

I am unsure why the Lord would choose to use and bless me in this way, but I am deeply grateful for His choosing. Throughout the entirety of the process I have been driven back to my knees in the presence of my Father. Every time I found the end of my rope, He was there to hand more rope to me and remind me that it is His rope anyway. Anything of any value in this project is due solely to His amazing grace and humbling love.

I am incredibly thankful for those who have surrounded me throughout this process to guide me, correct me, and rebuke me when necessary. Without the helpful coaching of my instructors and the prodding of my peers, this project would likely be unreadable. The Biblical Spirituality track at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has provided a constant reminder that before I am anything else, I am a son of the King. I am thankful for the authors who have taught me, and the instructors who have taught me to be taught by them.

I am especially thankful for my supervisor, Dr. Don Whitney. He was patient in offering corrections to my submissions and incredibly kind considering the amount of corrections he had to mark. I owe him an entire burnt-orange colored inkwell solely from the corrections he made on my initial submission of chapter 2. As the author of several of the books that shaped my education and the director of the Biblical Spirituality concentration that guided me, it is not a stretch to say that I owe both the content and

completion of my doctoral education to Dr. Whitney. Without him, I would be a different man than I am now.

I am also deeply indebted to my editor, Betsy Fredrick for saving me hours of tears and for helping me to write better.

Without the blessing and sending of the pastors and people of Washington Heights Baptist Church, there would be no project to read. Without the loving support of my *entire* family, I would have likely collapsed in an agitated state. Without the gracious lodging of Michael and Katelynn, and Chuck and Ellen, I would have been sleeping on the streets of Louisville. I hope I have been able to return at least some semblance of the favor. I owe an unpayable debt to you all.

Lastly, and certainly not of least importance, my wonderful wife, Leah, our vivacious daughter, Clara, and my unbelievably good-natured son, Baker, have been my inspiration, joy, peace, and encouragement to finish and finish well. I list them last only so that they will stick in the reader's memory. I have always needed Leah's knack for not letting me quit and for always being right. She sees in me the invisible—if anyone even almost sees me the way the Lord does, it is her. Furthermore, I never knew how much I needed Clara until she was born, and now I wonder how I ever functioned before her smile, laugh, and courage. Her little brother Baker has only added to the joy.

If I could dare to have a hope and prayer for this project, it would be for it to be exactly what the Lord has planned and intended for it to be. May it be a blessing to the families of Washington Heights, a spur to my own parenting, and a beginning to the Lord's wonderful work amongst His people. I am His instrument, His art. May His Name be big.

Josh Tuttle

Dayton, Ohio

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As humans enter the world they are shaped by a set of circumstances beyond their control. Ethnicity, genetic biology, and place of birth all play a significant role in shaping the trajectory of human lives—but families play the largest role in determining the outcome of development. The impact of the family is felt the most in the early stages of a child’s life. These formative years create habits and behaviors that every person will spend the rest of their life either benefiting from or unlearning. Because of this reality, the level of importance placed on discipleship by the family will have a lasting impact on a child’s lifelong spiritual development. Today’s individualistic society is reaping the fruit of families that treat faith as a secondary issue. If believers are going to recapture what it means to be the people of God, there must be a conscious effort to rediscover the power of family discipleship.

Context

Washington Heights Baptist Church has always been a church that honors the importance of family. On any given Sunday one can see a grandfather worshipping with his grandchildren, grown siblings sitting with their families in the same pew, and even in-laws pretending to like each other for the duration of a service. Whether it was by intentional effort, or the grace of God, the 60-plus year history of Washington Heights has been a testament to strong family faith. I know this firsthand, for it is the church in which my wife grew up and is still the church body to which her parents belong. This strong family community was what brought us back to Washington Heights after I left a previous pastorate to pursue camp work. We felt isolated in our last church and wanted to

find a church with a strong sense of community. Where better than the congregation that raised my wife?

It has been a blessing to return to the community at Washington Heights. Because of the strong family culture throughout the history of the church and because so many of the congregants have a strong personal history of church attendance, the church is filled with folks who know how to live together as the family of God. This means that the people have historically been strong givers, faithful servers, and loyal members. The church also tends to be more traditional in ministry style compared to some of the surrounding churches, even to the use of an organ and traditional Adult Bible Fellowship Sunday School classes. Many in the congregation have been around for most of the history of the church—some since before the church ever had its own building—a fact that, for better or worse, has caused Washington Heights to walk slowly and tenderly into change. This reality contributes to its remaining well-grounded in a strong theological tradition, rather than being “blown about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14).¹

While I have seen the blessings of these strong foundations as I have spent the past several years observing and participating in the community of Washington Heights, I have also noticed the unintended consequences of resting on past success. If the church is not consistently evaluating, growing, and changing in their lives together as the people of God by holding the mirror of Scripture to ourselves, our reliance on past strengths can lead us to overlook present weaknesses. Because of this tendency, Washington Heights has not been immune to some of the shifts in church culture around America. As a result, church attendance, giving—and most damaging—family discipleship, have slowly but steadily declined.

What I have experienced—and what was the focus of my project—is that the norm amongst modern evangelicals, including the families of Washington Heights, has

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

been to inadvertently settle for a consumeristic, lazy, and insufficient way of raising children in the ways of Christ by relegating the spiritual development of families to the “professionals.” On Sunday mornings, children go to Sunday School and teenagers to youth group while the adults go to the worship service, and this seems to be good enough. This ineffective form of spiritual development does not necessarily occur because parents do not love their children or care about their spiritual growth—on the contrary—the parents of Washington Heights love their families and truly want to see them follow the Lord. The best hope for this project’s success was firmly rooted in that truth. What has happened in much of evangelical church culture in America, however, is that a lack of proper teaching and emphasis on personal spiritual development and discipleship has led parents to sacrifice intentionality for convenience and discipleship for attendance. The spiritual training of the home has been replaced by the convenience of a church classroom.

Rationale

Before the development of the public school system, the home used to be the source of a child’s educational upbringing, but over time the development of culture has created more options for instruction outside of the immediate family. Where once there were few external options for who would teach a child how to read, play piano, or worship God, the horizon is now filled with competitors for every family’s investment of time and money. In an effort to give children the best chance to succeed, parents rely on putting them in the best situations to nourish their natural gifts. This means finding the best soccer program, the sharpest piano instructor, the most reputable school. Parents have delegated more and more of their child’s instruction to professionals in the pursuit of “success.”

Over time, this cultural mindset has further influenced a child’s religious upbringing. As with every other area of their lives, parents want their children to be the best Christians they can be. While this is good motivation, growing numbers of church

programs and ministries can almost appear similar to the options of soccer clubs or piano instructors. A child's discipleship can appear to be reduced almost to a commodity—just another selection on a buffet line of endless opportunities. Unless parents are watchful, Christian education becomes one more activity on the schedule; one more event to squeeze into an ever shrinking 24-hour day.

The problem in many cases is not a lack of love or incapable parents—it is a lack of Christian intentionality. The solution is not one more program or expert—it is parents who are willing to be more explicit with their children about faith. When parents leave a child's faith up to chance or to the work of someone else, their children may have a difficult time seeing their own Christianity as genuine. This intentionality can be a terrifying prospect for parents in a world that has subtly told them they are not well-equipped to teach their children and should leave it up to professionals.

Families must begin to see Christianity as an all-encompassing, life-changing allegiance to Jesus Christ. Children are experts at sniffing out bogus and insincere motives and rooting out fakers. Therefore, when parents think they can push Christianity on their children and benefit from some sound moral teaching without a firm gospel foundation, they are actually making the problem worse. Children tend to find ways to rebel, and unless they encounter the living God, they are likely to turn against His church.

Parents cannot afford to be lazy in discipling their children. The alternative is rudderless children blown about by the winds of culture. Firm grounding in Christ as the foundation of reality will set them up to walk in His ways all their life.

Of course, most Christian parents are not intentionally lazy with their children's spiritual upbringing, but their church's culture may have convinced them that their children are better off in the hands of professionals. This mindset is subtle and often difficult to detect in one's own life, which is why families need to be intentionally taught the importance of discipling their children. Too often church leaders leave the discovery

of this truth to chance, but this counter-cultural teaching requires deliberate focus and instruction.

The teachings of Scripture show that God’s primary means of discipleship was always meant to be found in the family unit. Deuteronomy 6 instructs families to constantly teach the ways of God—an instruction Paul repeats in Ephesians 6. Joshua’s farewell address shows the importance of a family taking seriously their role as the people of God, leaving no room for chance in the spiritual direction of a Christian family (Josh 24). Psalm 78 exhorts the passing on of God’s glory from generation to generation and reveals the blessings of intentionally participating in this process. Repeatedly in the recorded Acts of the Apostles, one can see examples of entire families converting and worshipping together.

This project focused on training parents how to better disciple their children and equipping them with the tools to do so. By changing the heart and intentionality of parents, there is hope for change in the spiritual trajectory of their families. Moreover, as families are healed and made whole in Christ, a culture can be created throughout the church body that leads parents to utilize church resources as a helpful tool, rather than leaning on them as a crutch.

Purpose

This purpose of this project was for the parents of Washington Heights Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, to intentionally disciple their children in the ways of Christ.

Goals

To successfully shepherd the families of Washington Heights in discipleship, three goals were achieved.

1. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship perceptions and practices among families at Washington Heights.
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum to train, equip, and encourage families at Washington Heights to intentionally disciple their children.

3. The third goal was to change the perceptions and practices of family discipleship among the families of Washington Heights by implementing the developed curriculum in a four-week parenting course.

The following section details the research methodology that measured and determined the success for each stated goal.²

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current discipleship perceptions and practices among the families of Washington Heights participating in the project. To better develop the curriculum that helped train the participating families, I required a clearer understanding of their current practices of family discipleship. This goal was measured by administering a Family Discipleship Survey to the families who participated in the course and was considered successful when each family had completed the survey.³ The Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey asked questions regarding the family's views and implementation of family discipleship, while also gathering basic biographical information. This survey was used again at the end of the project to evaluate the impact of the process for the families participating in the next steps.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum to train, equip, and encourage families at Washington Heights to intentionally disciple their children. This goal was measured by a select panel of church leaders who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, scope, methodology, and applicability of the process.⁴ This panel included the children's director of Washington Heights, the children's pastor of a local church, two local youth pastors, as well as a pastor of discipleship and a senior pastor—both of whom

² All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

³ See appendix 1.

⁴ See appendix 2.

are former youth pastors. This goal was considered successfully met when all lines of criteria were deemed acceptable to the panel.

The third goal was to change the perceptions and practices of family discipleship among the families of Washington Heights by implementing the developed curriculum in a four-week parenting course. Throughout the course, parents were shown firsthand from the Bible the role God calls them to in discipling their families, and were challenged to consider their practice of both personal and family spiritual disciplines. In addition to the curriculum, parents were given opportunity to engage other families in discussion about the curriculum, and they received recommendations of several books and other resources to guide them in the process of discipling their children. This goal was measured by re-administering the assessment survey in order to chart the family's growth based on the effectiveness of this intentional training curriculum. The goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test demonstrates a significant, positive difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Programmatic family ministry. Of the four primary models for family ministry, the *programmatic* model involves the least amount of family participation.⁵ This view separates age-based ministries into silos with little intergenerational interaction. In a *programmatic* model of ministry, families are consumers who participate in a professionally developed program, while responsibility for a child's spiritual development and training lies solely with the church leadership. This view represents the commonly-held, culturally-influenced view of family ministry that this project primarily worked to reverse.

⁵ These models are Programmatic, Family-Based, Family-Equipping, and Family-Integrated, as based on the findings in Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 41-43.

Family-integrated ministry. Considered by many to be the most radical model of family ministry, the *family-integrated model* has gained popularity through the ministry and writing of Voddie Baucham. This model eliminates age-segregated ministries, choosing instead to integrate the entire family into congregational teaching and worship. The primary focus of this church model is for generations to learn and worship together while parents take responsibility for the evangelism and discipleship of their children. Each scripturally ordered household is a building block, and together these building blocks constitute the local church. Baucham explains this ministry model:

I believe we are looking for answers in all the wrong places. Our children are not falling away because the church is doing a poor job—although that is undoubtedly a factor. Our children are falling away because we are asking the church to do what God designed the family to accomplish. Discipleship and multi-generational faithfulness begins and ends at home. At best, the church is to play a supporting role as it ‘equips the saints for the work of ministry.’⁶

Family-equipping ministry. *Family-equipping ministry* models maintain some age-segregated ministries, but each ministry is typically drawn together with the same focus and teaching to best equip families to learn together.⁷ Ministry leaders in this model do everything to champion the parent’s place as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives. On the flip side, as Timothy Paul Jones explains, “Parents recognize the church as a community called to participate actively in the discipleship of all believers, including children.”⁸ In this model, the church equips parents to disciple their children and the parents recognize the church as an active partner in this process. All events, programs, and ministries within the church are reshaped to call and equip parents to disciple their children. To best explain this model, Jones uses the metaphor of a river, which represents a child’s spiritual development. The shores of the river represent the

⁶ Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 9.

⁷ This model was made popular by the work of Timothy Paul Jones and Randy Stinson.

⁸ Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 42.

parents and the church—both of which are vital in the focus and strength of the child’s development. He defines *family ministry* as

the process of intentionally and persistently coordinating a ministry’s proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives. . . . [It is] less about a particular program and more about how we can redeploy the programs that we already have.⁹

My view of family discipleship for this project was most closely related to the family-equipping model in a practical sense. While I agree with Baucham’s teaching that the home ought to be the primary source of a child’s discipleship, and that the church body was created to learn and worship together, it would be difficult to practically implement his model into my current context. By removing all age-segregated ministries, Washington Heights would be cutting the legs out from under its parents who already feel as though they are drowning in the pressure to succeed. This is not to say that the church ought to settle for less than God’s intended best, but instead must be wise in growth, not rushing or attempting to change everything at once. Instead, my definition for family discipleship is to be, as Jones defines it, “a movement toward equipping Christian households to function as outposts of God’s mission in the world.”¹⁰

At the end of the day, the goal of the church is to be the people of God; to be growing in His ways, worshipping His glory, and carrying the reality of His kingdom into a broken world in desperate need of His grace. This is best realized in my ministry context and for this project by practically implementing a family-equipping model, while teaching toward the theological truth of the family-integrated model.

Three limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-surveys relationships was largely dependent on the honesty of families. If families were not truthful, whether intentionally or not, then I would be unable to properly address

⁹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2011), 33.

¹⁰ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 59.

their needs and the families be less likely to hear any advice or wisdom. Honesty is key to human growth. To combat this limitation, participants were permitted anonymity and encouraged to see that best growth comes from full honesty. The second limitation was similar to the first and was the full participation and commitment of the families. If families were not fully committed to admitting their weaknesses and growing, then they would not see sufficient progress. Third, the responsiveness of children could not be controlled and therefore required patience to perceive the long-term effects of the training. Because of this, some families may not see immediate growth in the timeframe of the project.

Two delimitations were placed on this project. First, only the families who participated in all four teaching sessions were considered in the final analysis of the pre- and post-surveys. Measuring only those families who participated in the entirety of the course removed poor results that might have been based on not having received necessary instruction. Second, the teaching of the curriculum took place over four weeks. Any less time, and the families would not have had the opportunity to receive a proper amount of training necessary to see growth and change. Any more time and the families may not have been able to commit to being part of the whole process.

Conclusion

The difficult reality of being a disciple of Christ is that the work of growing is never done—believers will always have more to learn and change and heal within themselves. Much like gardening, this work is intimate and requires hands-on attention that cannot be rushed or left untended. The Scriptures reveal a God who works throughout life in these often slow, but powerful ways. The next chapter will focus on digging into the Word to see that God created the family unit with the purpose of carrying His purposes and His glory to subsequent generations through the life-long work of discipleship.

CHAPTER 2

GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS FOR FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

Scripture tells the story of God doing, through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son, all that was needed to bring humanity back to Himself. Before Christ's ascension, His last command to His followers was to make disciples of all nations, and to extend the Good News of His work to the world so that people might be saved (Matt 28:19-20). The rest of the New Testament, and especially the Acts of the Apostles, reveals this commission being carried out through the proclamation of the gospel by individual believers collectively through the church. While the church is the vehicle to carry the gospel to the world, a study of Scripture reveals God's original intention for the family to also act as an important vehicle to pass the knowledge of God from one generation to another. The family and the church were made to work together hand-in-hand to "tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and His might, and the wonders that he has done" (Ps 78:4). On this side of heaven, neither is to replace the other, and when both work together, the discipleship of a child can blossom. Scripture reveals God's plan for the family to operate as the primary means of discipleship in the life of a child, while mandating the people of God to come alongside in support. The resurrection did not change this reality, but instead enforced and empowered family discipleship as part of God's plan from the very beginning.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9: Foundations of Family Discipleship

The foundational teaching of the family as an essential part of God's plan for discipleship is found in Deuteronomy 6. God reveals through the teaching of Moses that being His people and living for Him is not done by following some abstract formula, but

through the everyday, ordinary aspects of human life. One of these ordinary means of experiencing God's grace is the basic family unit. God created humans so that every person is physically and genetically born to two separate people, a male and a female, and while culture has twisted the institution of family for its own agenda, it cannot take away the basic biological fact that God created every child with parents. The most basic relational unit in a person's life is his family. While many families today are considered broken, that should remain the exception, not the rule in understanding God's intended order of life.

Through the teaching of Moses, God reveals His original desire for the family to declare the glory and knowledge of God to the next generation. In today's world, many parents become dependent upon programs and experts rather than trusting themselves with the responsibility of discipling their children. Yet this passage clearly reveals God's desire for children of believers to learn about Him from their parents in the midst of their everyday lives more than through a program of education external to the family. The words of author, minister, and professor Dallas Willard can serve to encourage parents at this point: "An indication of our greatness, for all our dustiness, is found precisely in the fact that God pays attention to us, meets us, and gives us work to do."¹ Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reveals this work, which is to worship God only, love Him fully, and live in a way that teaches His glory to the next generation.

YHWH Alone

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4). Moses' teaching in this passage can be broken into three primary sections: (1) a call to worship YHWH solely, (2) a command to love YHWH totally, and (3) ways to put this love and worship into practice in one's daily life. While the practical implications of family discipleship are not obvious until the last section, it is necessary to understand and follow

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: HarperOne, 1999), 47.

the flow of thought in this passage to build the foundation for why the family is the primary source of discipleship. Without the foundation of a reverent awe of God, all that follows is meaningless.

This passage begins in verse 4 with what has been historically called the Shema, which is Hebrew for “hear.”² This statement of belief was so significant to Jewish culture that it would have been known to every Hebrew from a very young age. Not only was it memorized, but it was repeated at least twice daily during morning and evening prayers.³ Of all statements about YHWH and all proclamations of faith, this statement became the one around which Jewish culture was centered.

The Shema is a difficult passage to translate from Hebrew to English, and it is translated differently throughout the various popular translations of Scripture.⁴ Older versions, such as the Revised Standard Version and the King James Version say, “The LORD our God is one LORD,” while more modern translations like the English Standard Version and the New International Version read, “The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” Both the New Revised Standard Version and the New Living Translation state, “The LORD is our God, the Lord alone.” With so many variations, it can be difficult for non-Hebrew speakers to properly understand such a significant statement. To properly do so, it is best to break it down into smaller sections.

First, the passage refers to the LORD in all capital letters, which is always a placeholder for the proper name of God: YHWH. Beginning with a basic understanding that this statement is referring to YHWH, who reveals Himself to Israel throughout its history and who gives His name in Exodus 3, the Shema states that this YHWH

² Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 133.

³ Deanna A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville: John Knox, 2014), 76.

⁴ Woods, *Deuteronomy*, 134.

specifically is God. It is a positive spin on negative statements, such as “Baal is *not* God” or “Zeus is *not* God.” While it is significant to understand what or who is *not* God, it is equally important to know Who Is.

Many modern readers have grown up using the term “God” to refer specifically to the God of Scripture, perhaps believing it is simply His name. However, to refer to something as God is to say it is ultimate in power, that it is the highest of things. The Shema begins by stating that YHWH is the highest power in the universe, the ultimate being.

The last part of the Shema states the YHWH is not simply God, but He is the only God, He is God *alone*, He is *one* God. This serves as a statement against both polytheism and idolatry, two issues that would surround and tempt the Israelites throughout their history. The final meaning of this significant teaching is that YHWH is the highest and ultimate being and end of the universe, and He is that alone. There are no other gods, and YHWH does not share power. The teaching of family discipleship found in the rest of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 must be founded on the understanding that YHWH is God alone, and that no idols or gods can compete with Him. It is only in total devotion to Him, as seen in the next verse, that family discipleship can find success, because this belief changes the purpose and goal of every aspect of life.

Measuring Our Love

The passage continues with the command, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6:5). This command to love God is fairly new in the unfolding of God’s revelation to this point, and exclusive to the teaching of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy, love is a type of loyalty, and the depth of this loyalty is addressed next in the Shema.⁵ Verse 5 lists three different

⁵ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 351.

ways with which the hearers are to love God: with heart, soul, and might. This progression is not simply poetical; rather, each statement describes a different aspect of one's love and loyalty to YHWH, leading to total devotion. Pastor and author Voddie Baucham explains this in his book *Family Driven Faith*: “The three Hebrew words used here (translated *heart*, *soul*, and *might*) provide a clear biblical definition of love: *Love is an act of the will accompanied by emotion that leads to action on behalf of its object.*”⁶

While modern culture may be familiar with the metaphor of the heart as the organ of love, it is typically meant as an uncontrollable emotional flow. The understanding in Hebrew culture of the heart as a source of love carries a very different meaning. Baucham writes, “The Hebrew word for heart is *lebab*. . . . The word means ‘inner man, mind, or will.’ . . . Hence biblical love is *an act of the will*; it is a choice.”⁷

After commanding the Hebrew people to love God with their will, Moses commands a love that comes from their souls. While the use of the word *soul* can mean many different things, in this context—and throughout the Old Testament—it refers to the life-force or the thing that makes humans, human. It is the fiber of one's being, and to love God with it is a devotion of the entire self to Him, leading many throughout the history of God's people to believe that this teaching meant a willingness to sacrifice one's own life on God's behalf.⁸

Lastly, God's people are to love Him with their might. This is another term that can prove tricky for the modern English reader to fully understand. While the idea of *might* can refer to strength or wealth, it is only used in this way in two places in the Hebrew Scriptures, here and in 2 Kings 23:25, which is a restatement of the command in this passage. Elsewhere, this word *meod* is used as an adverb meaning “very, muchness,

⁶ Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 58, emphasis original. See also Patrick Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 2012), 102.

⁷ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 59, emphasis original.

⁸ Wienfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 339.

or in excess.”⁹ In Genesis 1:31, it is used when God finds creation to be *very* good. Later, in Genesis 4:5, it tells that Cain became *very* angry before committing the first murder. In Genesis 7:18, it refers to the *excess* to which the earth was covered with the flood. Elsewhere, it is used to refer to God’s might behind the plagues and the fatness of King Eglon of Moab. These are but a few examples to show the depth of meaning behind this word and the totality to which it calls God’s people to love Him. While wealth and strength are certainly part of the *muchness* of one’s effort in loving God, this word feels more like a blank check than a specific amount or commitment.

Because of their understanding of YHWH as the only God, His people are to love Him with their will and choices, their very souls, and everything else. It is this total devotion and loyalty to YHWH that leads into the practical teaching found in the next several verses. To once more quote Baucham, “Love is proved by our efforts. If I say I love God, there should be evidence in the things I do (or the way I expend my energy and effort).”¹⁰ This total, unwavering devotion to God lays the foundation for parents to disciple their children. Without a total commitment, children may discern confusion or competition in parental goals and decisions, leading them to see devotion to God as a mere option, rather than a necessity. Children often inherit their parents’ religion, and unfortunately this includes nominalism.

Practical Life

The Shema continues in verses 6-9,

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:6-9)

⁹ Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 103.

¹⁰ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 61.

Fully understanding verses 4 and 5 is vital to the implementation of the next four. Sole allegiance to YHWH, with no other gods, followed by a wholistic devotion to Him in loyal love must lead to an outpouring of actions. When the human soul is realigned to its Source, it can begin to live the life God intended and reflect Him into the world as His image. Patrick Miller brings out the significance of this understanding for the rest of life—and the rest of this passage—when he writes,

The oneness of the Lord your God is matched by the oneness and totality of your devotion. . . . The demand of the Shema is, therefore, finally not just a demand. It is also what makes human life possible. All claims on human life are relativized and subsumed within the one total claim of God so that the demand is ultimately the gift of grace.¹¹

What follows is Moses' practical suggestions for how this love and devotion is to be lived out in ordinary lives.

As the commands of Moses imbed themselves in the heart and will of the hearers, the first response is that they are to be taught to the next generation. As Moses describes practical implications such as “talk of them when you sit in your house,” and “when you lie down,” Miller observes, “The picture is that of a family continually in lively conversation about the meaning of their experience with God and God's expectations of them.”¹² While this list of statements can be taken as legalistic commands or formulaic—and they frequently were throughout history—they ought to be understood as a lifestyle rather than a list of new rules. Understanding the heart of each specific statement creates a picture of family discipleship that goes beyond church attendance to redeeming every action and interaction to the glory and testament of God's sovereignty.

Verse 7 gives four specific ways that “teaching them diligently to your children” is lived out in the life of a family. First, families are to “talk of them when you sit in your house.” The home is the center of all family business. It is where days begin and end, and

¹¹ Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 103.

¹² Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 107.

no matter where the day leads, home is always the final destination. Therefore, it is vital that God's reign should be discussed significantly in this setting. In too many families today, God is a subject for church, while home is the place for conversations on topics such as sports, school, and other matters. However, if the things of God are not routinely discussed in the home, then the thinking can develop that home is not the proper place for such matters. As this subconscious mindset develops it sets the stage for children to learn that God is only for church, not for "real life." By not discussing God in the context of everyday life, families never learn how to apply the truth of God to every aspect of life. In light of this, family discipleship must begin at home. Rather than designating one sacred space (namely the church building) for discussing the things of God, the home and every place the family goes should be seen as an appropriate place for conversations pertaining to God and living for Him.

Nevertheless, conversations about God are not to be confined to the home, just as family life is not confined to the home. For it is "when you walk by the way" that the difficult issues of life often arise. This is not to say that the home is a perfectly safe environment, but things are far less controllable out in the world than they are under one's own roof. Teaching the truth of God in this way frequently requires families to "circle the wagons" as it were—to respond to the dangerous realities of the world by providing a God-centered lens through which to observe them. Children cannot always be protected from the wolves in the world; therefore, they must be equipped to respond appropriately. Christian education, books, and music can all be helpful ways to communicate a Christian worldview, and parents are wise to utilize such abundant resources. However, parents cannot rely on content control to last forever and must simultaneously find ways to protect their children while training them to make their own wise, Christian decisions. Parents can work to accomplish this by setting an example as their children watch them respond in Christlike ways to the harsh realities of the world.

This "talking of God when you walk by the way" means providing children

with a lens through which to see the world in light of God's kingdom. This is most simply accomplished through honest conversation. A typical example may be that a family finds themselves stuck behind a funeral procession while driving. Many parents may begin to be visibly frustrated, looking for ways around the procession without being too disrespectful. Instead, what if parents called the family to pray for the mourning families experiencing the loss? The father can begin by praying, and after setting the example ask his children to pray aloud as well. It is only by this example and opportunity for practice that children will learn the importance of prayer. This also has the added benefit of teaching children what it looks like to live humbly and lovingly in God's kingdom amid a world only interested in its own gain.

The power of this example can be seen similarly in passing car accidents, the homeless, traffic jams, or even billboards. Teaching children to see the world through the lens of God's kingdom is a major foundation in their discipleship—and this cannot be accomplished solely in the classroom. While some preparation for this work may take place in a classroom environment, without the real-life scenarios and example of parental behavior, children are largely left on their own to figure out how to live in the world, and the world is more than willing to help them do it in a worldly way. Parents are already fighting an uphill battle in this, for the voice of culture is loud and untiring. Therefore, as Moses teaches, it is up to the parents to teach and show their children how to live in the world “as they walk by the way.”

Beyond how days are lived, the way they are started and ended is equally significant. Every person's day begins and ends with sleep. God created humanity to operate within this circadian rhythm, and the last two statements in verse 7 work together to set the proper rhythm to the life of God's people. It is important to realize that no matter where the day goes, it always can and should end with God. In modern culture, bedtime is often filled with processes that encourage sleep, such as watching television, surfing the internet or social media, reading a book, or drinking a warm glass of milk.

While these rituals can be useful, they can also be a distraction from an opportunity to end the day with the Lord. What if at the end of the day believers fell asleep praying in bed, reflecting on the day, praising God for what He has done, and seeking His continued graces for the next morning? In too many households, bedtime is wartime. Parents wrestle with their children—sometimes literally—to get them down for bed. What if instead of war, this became a time to draw the family together in peaceful prayer and devotion to the Lord? This is not necessarily going to encourage children to fall asleep any easier—there may be no solution for that—but it teaches children that the rhythms of life are determined by God, not comfort and ease.

Similarly, the opening hours in most households can be chaotic and filled with shouting matches as children are ushered off to school and parents to work. In the sleepy, grumpy chaos, words are chosen less carefully, and feelings become collateral damage. Again, there may be no solution for sleepy children in the morning, but parents can set the example of establishing rhythm with God by taking time in His presence every morning and encouraging their children to do likewise. Even if children are not yet on board with the practice of their own daily devotional practices, parents who begin the day in the peace and presence of God provide an example of seeking to make God central in all of life, even in the midst of morning chaos. This is an important example that shows children that God is a priority and the source of every day.

Lastly, Moses gives more specific advice about ways to center one's life around God in verses 8 and 9. Miller writes, "It is difficult to know whether these instructions were meant to be taken literally or figuratively, but that is of little relevance for understanding their force."¹³ While Jewish culture eventually adapted these practices very literally, there is much historical support to read this teaching metaphorically and

¹³ Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 105.

symbolically.¹⁴ The idea behind binding these commands to the body and placing them on the doorposts of the home established these words as a companion for all of life. There is no void in which the commands to love God and worship Him only do not apply. Whatever God's people do with their hands and see with their eyes, wherever they go and whenever they return, all things are done under the implications of God as King.

When read together, every specific command and teaching of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 points to a life lived fully allegiant to God. It is not under special conditions or in certain areas that God's people are to obey commands or receive God's revelation, but in the ordinary and everyday moments of life. Moses' teaching reveals that no part of life cannot be redeemed by God's presence. There is no moment too small to be significant and no event too big to overshadow His love. In this everyday laboratory of life parents must disciple their children in the ways of God. It is not in the sterile classroom or in the beautiful church service—though these certainly have their place—but in the small moments that a child can learn to love God by watching his parents' example. Children are always watching and learning; kids are sponges for information, therefore, every second should be used to fill them with an awareness and love of God. This is true family discipleship.

Ephesians 6:1-4: Paul's Post-Crucifixion Support of Family Discipleship

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:1-4)

Many in modern church culture believe—sometimes without knowing they believe it—that everything written in the Old Testament is outdated and irrelevant for post-crucifixion life. No faithful pastor would ever say this from the pulpit and most well-informed congregants would know this is not true, but actions are louder than words, and

¹⁴ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 342.

too often the Old Testament is taught far less frequently and with less implied importance than the New. Aside from Christian teachers reclaiming the importance of the Old Testament, it must be understood that family discipleship is not just a nice, antiquated idea that God taught in Deuteronomy or that it is not quite relevant today. The truths presented in Deuteronomy 6 are not irrelevant on this side of the cross but are instead empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 6:1-4, Paul provides post-crucifixion teaching that reinforces rather than replaces what Moses taught as the intention of God for the family to be the primary means of discipleship in the life of a child.

“Drunk” with the Spirit

As Paul approaches the end of his letter to the Ephesian church, his writing takes what may seem a surprising turn. Until now, he has written about the unveiled mystery of God completed in the work of Christ and the continuing work of this mystery in each believer through the Holy Spirit. As he declares the grandness of the work of the Spirit in the church, it is notable that rather than continuing to rise above the everyday, ordinary things, he crescendos with the most commonplace of relationships: husband and wife, parent and child, boss and employee. Pastor and author Eugene Peterson remarks about this transition in Paul’s letter: “As he rounds out the ways that the Holy Spirit is at work making personally present the ‘boundless riches’ of Christ (Eph. 3:8) to us for our participation, it is significant that he ends up insisting that we pay careful attention to what is going on in family and workplace.”¹⁵ This reality further emphasizes what was taught in Deuteronomy 6, namely that it is not in grand religious settings, but in everyday life that children are best disciplined in the ways of Christ.

To best understand the teaching found in verses 1-4, one must look back to the context established in the previous chapter. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the most celebrated

¹⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 230.

pastors of the twentieth century, and commentator Clinton E. Arnold, both point back to verse 5:18, specifically as the main explanatory verse for the prescribed way of life that follows.¹⁶ This verse says, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Everything written after this statement serves as a practical example of how men and women live out this life of being filled with the Spirit. The state of drunkenness controls every aspect of a person’s mode of being. In the same way, believers are to be completely controlled by the filling of the Spirit. Paul first addresses wives and husbands, teaching them to live lives of loving submission to each other. He then moves on to children and parents, and, finally, servants and masters—or, in modern context, employers and employees. The Spirit fills believers so they can live out the ordinary aspects of life through extraordinary love and discipline.

For the Children

Paul begins his instruction regarding the parent/child relationship by first addressing the children. The children Paul addresses would essentially be those of the same age as those involved in children’s, youth, and family ministries of churches today.¹⁷ It is notable and countercultural that Paul addresses the children directly, rather than telling the parents to teach the children, thus revealing their expected involvement in corporate worship for the reading of this letter.¹⁸ In his address to the children, Paul simply calls them to obey their parents. However, this instruction is given with three distinct modifiers.

¹⁶ D Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit: In Marriage, Home, & Work* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 278; Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, in vol. 10 of *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 412.

¹⁷ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 415.

¹⁸ William Hendrickson, *Exposition of Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 258.

First, they are to obey their parents “in the Lord.” Arnold writes, “In the Lord does not modify ‘parents,’ but the command to obey, implying that the obedience transcends parental fear and is attributed directly to the Lord.”¹⁹ Similarly, New Testament scholar Frank Thielman points out the use of the phrase “in the Lord” throughout the letter to the Ephesians as a way to designate the believers’ involvement in the body of Christ.²⁰ The children were not viewed as a secondary or lesser part of the church, but rather as ones growing in the training of the Lord who had a serious responsibility to carry out God’s commands. Commentator John Eadie writes, “Not merely natural instinct, but religious motive should prompt children to obedience, and guard them in it.”²¹

Second, children are to obey their parents because it is “right.” This word “right” is the Greek word *dikaios*, which refers to nature rather than religious command.²² Children are to obey their parents because it follows God’s intended natural order of life. Throughout his letters, Paul shows a concern for proper order in both the Christian life and worship, and this teaching to children is no different. Not only should children obey their parents as they grow in their devotion to the Lord, but also because it is the way God ordained for families to behave. For children to not obey their parents is as unnatural as it would be for a tree to grow legs and start walking around. This teaching becomes difficult when parents are not leading Christlike lives, but it is significant that Paul addresses the children first. No matter what life brings, God’s best is always to be actively pursued. Lloyd-Jones speaks to the importance of right order in family relationships:

Whether we like it or not, a breakdown in home-life will eventually lead to a breakdown everywhere. This is, surely, the most menacing and dangerous aspect of

¹⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 416.

²⁰ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 397.

²¹ John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Classical Commentary Library (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1883), 437.

²² Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 438.

the state of society at this present time. Once the family idea, the family unit, the family life is broken up—once that goes, soon you will have no other allegiance. It is the most serious thing of all.²³

Much of modern society's issues can be traced back to imbalanced homes. Therefore, a child who is growing in the ways of God ought to be dedicated to obeying his parents.

Third, Paul qualifies the importance of children's obedience by pointing to the Ten Commandments. With no qualifying or introductory statements, he simply states the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land" (Exod 20:12), implying that if children desire to be obedient to God, they will be obedient to mom and dad. This statement would have been immediately recognizable to the ears of children raised in Christian homes, as they would have committed the Decalogue to memory from an early age.²⁴ By stating the attached promise, Paul is drawing on the blessing of God as incentive for children to be obedient. If children view the commands and promises of God as binding, then they will naturally want to honor their father and mother.

For the Parents

After addressing the children, Paul immediately turns his attention to the parents, and specifically, the fathers. Paul's address to fathers does not mean that mothers are excluded from instruction; rather, Paul—once again appealing to a desire for order—shows that the final responsibility for the rearing of children falls on the male head of the household. Arnold supports this God-ordained order and states, "Fathers have the ultimate responsibility of raising their children in such a way that they will be trained in understanding the essence of the Christian faith and that they will be instructed and admonished on how to live this out."²⁵ Hendrickson adds, "The reasons why the apostle

²³ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 245.

²⁴ Hendrickson, *Ephesians*, 259.

²⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 418.

addresses himself *especially* to them could well be *a.* because upon them as heads of their respective families the chief responsibility for the education of the children rests; and *b.* perhaps also because they, in certain instances even more than the mothers, are in need of the admonition here conveyed.”²⁶ Any implication that Paul here implies that one parent ought to raise the children while the other has no responsibilities is more revealing about the motives of the person making that assessment than Paul’s specific teaching. As Paul just addressed in the preceding paragraph, marriage is a covenant partnership fueled by mutual love and submission. Therefore, parents ought to read this command found in verse 4 as a shared responsibility rather than an excuse to shift blame.

Paul’s instruction to parents is broken into two directives, first negative, then positive. Parents are first told not to “provoke” their children “to anger.” Lloyd-Jones warns,

That is always a very real danger when we exercise discipline. And if we become guilty of it we shall do much more harm than good. We shall not have succeeded in disciplining our children, we shall simply have produced such a violent reaction in them, so much wrath and resentment, that the position will be worse, almost, than if we had not exercised any discipline at all.²⁷

Any parent can relate to the difficulty of balancing discipline out of love and correction rather than anger. Lloyd-Jones further speaks to this when he calls parents to control themselves before engaging in discipline: “What right have you to say to your child that he needs discipline when you obviously need it yourself?”²⁸

All parental discipline is for shaping children in the ways of the Lord, meaning that any offense given by the child is ultimately against God and not merely the parents. Parents must understand this if they are to overcome the human tendency toward an anger, which can lead to wrathful discipline. When parents are more concerned for their

²⁶ Hendrickson, *Ephesians*, 261.

²⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 277.

²⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 279.

own honor rather than God's, the point of discipline is missed. While children are certainly called to honor their parents, this honor is given as a shadow or precursor of the honor meant for God.²⁹ Parents serve under God in their authority over their children and ought to correct them lovingly, but sternly.

Paul then admonishes parents with a two-part positive instruction for discipline: they are to bring them up in the Lord's "discipline" and "instruction." The verb "bringing up" is the same verb used to refer to the tender and nourishing care of husbands to their wives in the previous paragraph. This is all-inclusive of everything that goes into raising children to maturity.³⁰ The phrases "discipline" and "instruction" cover everything from the typical teaching and training that occurs every day, to the warnings and corrective punishments meant to keep children on God's path. In this way, Paul indicates that every interaction between parent and child can and should be used to train children in the life for which God made them.

Two essential components of this daily training are raising children in a Bible-teaching church and practicing consistent family worship. Participation in a local, faithful, body of believers helps children learn of God and His Word from a source outside of their home, while family worship provides an intentional opportunity to center the family around the Word of God and prayer in the home. These two sources act as opposite sides of the same coin, and when one is missing an imbalance is felt. Training children in the ways of the Lord is first and foremost the responsibility of the family, but family training is to be supplemented and supported by a local, loving, Bible-teaching fellowship of believers.

²⁹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1999), 446. While the works of Peter O'Brien have been pulled from shelves and undergone scrutiny due to issues of plagiarism, the content from this source was still helpful for the purposes of this research.

³⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 418.

Implications for Family Discipleship

Lloyd-Jones explains the significance of developing a right relationship between parents and children: “In the relationship of children to parents we have a picture of the relationship of all mankind originally to God.”³¹ The family is to be the primary means of discipleship in a child’s life because the parent-child dynamic is a mirror of the relationship between God and man. It is of the utmost importance for parents to discipline their children well. Obviously, much of the onus for success is the children’s responsibility, but by instructing both, Paul takes away any chance for blame to be passed from one party to another. In his farewell sermon to his church in Northampton, Massachusetts, leading pastor and theologian of America’s First Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards, admonished the congregation that “every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by His rules.”³² When families act as “a little church,” they point one another to God. However, this beautiful reality is only possible when every member of the family comes together in mutual submission to God’s ordered way of life.

Paul’s teaching for families echoes perfectly what Moses teaches in Deuteronomy 6. It is in this most ordinary of human relationships that human lives are drawn to God. Eugene Peterson amplifies this idea:

There is nothing of God that is not livable by us. Nothing in creation, nothing in salvation is remote from or irrelevant to who we are, the people we live with, and the people we work with. Every jot and tittle in the gospel of Jesus Christ is here for *living*, for embodiment in each and every one of *our* bodies, for working into the muscle and bone of our ordinary lives.³³

As families are filled with the Spirit, proper discipline will begin to yield proper discipleship to Christ.

³¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 245.

³² Jonathan Edwards, *The Complete Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (London, 1834; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:ccvi.

³³ Peterson, *Practice Resurrection*, 226.

Joshua 24 and Psalm 78: Two Examples of God's Ordination of Family Discipleship

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4 are perhaps the most important biblical passages for understanding God's design for family discipleship, but the principles in them are not confined to these two passages. On a broad scale, the entire story of the Old Testament follows the family of Abraham as it passes its faith as a way of life from generation to generation. In the New Testament, families are often seen coming to faith together. When Paul leads the Philippian jailer to Christ, the man's entire family is baptized as well (Acts 16:33). Timothy is pointed to faith by his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice (2 Tim 1:5). Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, takes the news of the Messiah to his brother, Nathanael, before anyone else (John 1:45). While each of these would be worthy of further consideration as they relate to the subject of this project, I will now focus on two other passages which support the proposition that children should learn the things of God in the home.

Joshua 24: A House United

Joshua 24 takes place during one of the more peaceful periods of Israel's history. Most of the book is dedicated to the battles and movements of the Israelite army against the Canaanites dwelling in the land, then once most of the land has been conquered, to the giving and settling of the land itself. The specific setting for the story found in chapter 24 actually begins in chapter 23 with the phrase, "a long time afterward" (23:1). The reader is told that God has given a period of rest to the battle-weary people of Israel and Joshua is old. These two statements reveal that Israel was in danger of making the transition from adrenaline-pumping aggression to comfortable complacency. This is not an unusual place for believers to eventually find themselves. Over time, a flurry of action and service found in the joy of initial conversion becomes commonplace as a simple reality of life. Much like a romantic relationship, the spark can dim and go out after the victory has been won and life settles in to the new normal. Joshua sees and addresses this complacent mindset in chapter 24.

As Joshua perceives that his departure from this life is imminent, he gathers all the people of Israel to address their commitment to the Lord. He begins in verses 1-13 by reminding the people of all God has done for them and how He brought them into the relative peace and prosperity they now enjoy. In verse 13, (speaking for God) he says, “I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.” This reminder from Joshua ties directly to the promise God makes in Deuteronomy 6:10-11, which is followed by the warning to “take care lest you forget the LORD.” This passage is not the random ramblings of a man at the end of his life, but a call back to the warning given by God at the beginning of this long journey.

In verse 14, Joshua exhorts—or rather, pleads with—the people to fear the LORD and leave the gods that were a part of their past. It seems that the people have had a hard time remaining untainted by the sins of their foreign neighbors. It is in verse 15 that Joshua finally gives the ultimatum that if they do not want to serve the LORD, then the time has come to make that decision, but he and his family will serve the LORD. This final statement presents an inspirational challenge for families as they consider their priorities and who is responsible for leading their children in the ways of God.

It is not revealed what Joshua’s family thought of this statement or whether they agreed. Joshua was an old man, meaning his children were likely grown with families of their own, and yet, he claims responsibility for their service to God. At this time, extended families lived together in a cluster of houses, meaning there would have been a great deal of interaction and influence with the patriarchal family leader and every member of his line.³⁴ Joshua’s bold statement might have believing parents of teenagers today bracing themselves for angsty backlash from their children, nevertheless Joshua sets the example of taking responsibility for a family’s faith no matter the age of the child.

³⁴ Richard Hess, *Joshua*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 6 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 100.

As parents take a stand to reject the gods of a pagan world, it is important to identify those gods so their families can better recognize them when they slip into their lives. In Joshua's day, the choice presented was between YHWH, the God of Israel, on the one side, and the gods of their ancestors and the culture around them—namely, the Amorites—on the other.³⁵ The gods of their ancestors meant the gods from their days in Egypt, the gods their fathers turned to when they lived in slavery on the other side of the river. The Egyptian pantheon featured gods represented in practical everyday ways, such as the river, the sun, the moon, fertility, and pleasure. During their 400 years in slavery, Israel adopted some of the cultural pagan practices, which tainted their commitment to YHWH. When Israel left Egypt, they were not just leaving slavery behind, but also an entire mindset of pagan living.

However, the religious situation the Israelites had walked into was not any better. God commanded and equipped the people to wipe out all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, but they did not fully obey and found themselves living amongst those who served pagan gods. Even after all that YHWH had done to rescue them and all He continued to do to sustain them, the allure of the gods of culture, with their physical representation in idols and their permission of forbidden pleasures, was too strong for Israel to resist.

In modern America, gods do not have the same personas as they did in the days of Israel, yet false gods are alive and well. It seems almost impossible to assemble an exhaustive list of the gods of culture, but financial prosperity, career success, safety and health, comfort, pleasure, sports, education, and even rest are all representative of gods that almost every household will need to combat. The American Dream is banging on the doors of every Christian household, shouting that parents do not love their children if they are not pushing for their worldly success. Because of their subtle nature, these idols

³⁵ Matthew Henry, *Joshua to Esther*, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Mclean, VA: Macdonald Publishing, 1985), 114.

have crept into churches in ways that make them almost unnoticeable and even accepted. As Christian households take a stand for the Lord, these idols must be identified and rejected.

Of course, all false gods can be boiled down to one: the idol of self. Every decision and moment of human life is ultimately a choice between two options: self or God. As parents lead their households, they are either pointing their children to the Lord and His will, or they are pointing them to the world. This does not mean that Christians will never or should never experience earthly success, but when those measures of success become the goal rather than a blessing from the hands of a generous God, then they take His place on the throne of people's lives. And as Moses teaches in Deuteronomy 6, God does not share power. Parents must be on guard against the subtle danger of making the temporary more important than the eternal.

This was the choice Israel had to make: to choose their own pleasure and success represented by the gods of culture, or to choose the God who created, saved, and sustained them. Whether it was the reminder of everything that YHWH had done for them or the strong example set by Joshua, the people cried out as one to give their assent to follow and obey the LORD. While his plea appeared to be successful, Joshua knew that simply giving verbal assent to his challenge would not decisively win the war against pagan culture. The back and forth between Joshua and the people found in verses 16-24 shows Joshua's determination to warn and equip these families of the challenges that lay ahead. False gods are alluring and enticing, and—as seen throughout the rest of Israel's history—it takes a continually renewed commitment to stand strong in the face of culture. This is why Joshua ends the gathering by erecting a monument to serve as a constant reminder of the people's commitment to the LORD. While simply establishing a stone of witness does not guarantee successful commitment to God, it was meant to be a constant reminder that would serve as a guidepost pointing back to God and a call to remember their covenant.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge of following in Joshua’s footsteps is knowing that parents ultimately have no control over their children’s actions. By taking a stand for God, parents are not promising perfection, but setting it as the bar. By declaring that their family will be faithful to God, parents are in a sense saying, “We will not rest until our children’s souls are safely in the hands of God.” Making a commitment to continually urge a child toward faith in Christ means that nothing is left to chance and that a child’s faith will be sought intentionally, rather than outsourced to “professionals.”

Following Joshua’s example is difficult and not always popular, but there is no greater joy than when a family can truly stand together as a family in both blood *and* spirit. Timothy Paul Jones teaches a change of mindset throughout his book *Family Ministry Field Guide* by encouraging parents to see their children as not just children, but as potential brothers and sisters in Christ.³⁶ Families need to not only make their children’s faith a priority, but the ultimate goal. No one is better equipped to reach a child for the Lord than his or her parents, so why should this privilege and responsibility be left to anyone else?

Psalm 78: A Family Testimony

While many of the psalms encourage, exhort, and instruct the reader toward family discipleship, Psalm 78 stands alone as the best example of God’s people fulfilling His ordination for the family to be the primary place where children learn His truth. This psalm is the longest of the historical psalms, the others being psalms 105-107, 114, and 135-136.³⁷ However, the psalm is not simply historical in nature, explains commentator Marvin E. Tate, but the given title of *maskil* can also be translated as “proverb” or “parable.” He describes the style of psalm as “a teaching psalm in the form of a story,

³⁶ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 71.

³⁷ Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 76-150*, Holman Old Testament Commentary, vol. 12 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 14.

told in poetry.”³⁸ In his commentary on the Psalms, pastor and commentator James Montgomery Boice writes of this particular psalm, “It is one of the great historical psalms: It recounts the history of the people of Israel in order to draw lessons from it—lessons as to who God is, what he has done, how the people responded to him wrongly in the past, and how they should learn from those past failures today.”³⁹ According to commentator John Goldingay, the psalm exists “not merely to record the past but to change the future.”⁴⁰ This psalm is a story that serves as a warning, but for the purposes of this project, one of the most significant aspects is the use of story—God’s story—as an important means of parents discipling their children .

Boice points out that the nature and intended purpose of this psalm are similar to those of Deuteronomy 6. Not only does the psalmist tell hearers to pass specific information to the next generation, echoing Deuteronomy 6:4-9, but the form of teaching is reminiscent of the example Moses sets in 6:20-25: spiritual conversation and testimony.⁴¹ This psalm is an example of the type of testimony Moses tells parents to use as they teach and encourage their children.

While the specific lesson from the psalm about the ever-constant faithfulness of God versus chronic faithlessness of man is invaluable, what is more pertinent for this particular study is the “preamble” of the psalm that calls for the lesson to be passed to the next generation. In verse 3, the psalmist refers to the specific teaching of this psalm as something “that our fathers have told us,” revealing that the idea that passing God’s instruction from one generation to the next is not a new concept, and that the ability to

³⁸ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 281.

³⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42-106*, *Psalms: an Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 645.

⁴⁰ John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, of *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 479.

⁴¹ Boice, *Psalms*, 645.

pass God's teaching to one's children happens only because one's own father did the same thing. The psalmist goes on, claiming with confidence, "We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD" (Ps 78:4). The claim that Israel will *not* hide these teachings from their children implies that failing to tell these truths to children is to withhold something valuable from them.

The psalmist ends the first stanza with three specific things that are to be passed on to the coming generation: (1) the glorious deeds of the LORD, (2) His might, and (3) the wonders that He has done. The deeds of the LORD serve as the vehicle for passing on His truth. Certainly, parents could hold theological seminars for their children, but humans—and especially children—learn better through stories. Therefore, the "might" and "wonder" will be passed by retelling His deeds. This same truth is seen in the very nature of Scripture, which consists of a great deal of narrative among its various genres. Stories speak to the heart, and a change of heart leads to a change of life. This is seen in Deuteronomy 6:5 when Moses teaches the Israelites to love the Lord first with their hearts.

The "glorious deeds of the LORD" are not told for the sake of having a good story to tell, but that God's might would be revealed. Stories of God do not tell of how He had tough competition, but finally bested His rivals. Instead, the stories of God's deeds are stories of His dominance. God's might, His ultimate power, and omnipotence are on display in stories that acknowledge Him, and this power will capture attention and turn hearts. Too often, humans turn their allegiance to second-rate gods with unfulfilling power, such as money or sex, but YHWH is a God who overcomes all competitors without breaking a sweat. Revealing this truth to children through stories is a sure way to capture imaginations and hearts.

The third item that the fathers addressed in Psalm 78:4 was to pass on to their children "the wonders that [God] has done." One of the characteristics that often distinguishes children from adults is a healthy sense of wonder. Children marvel with a

sense of amazement, believing the world to be full of mystery and magic. By hearing stories of God's incomparable might, children's imaginations are influenced by Scripture, and the world is full of the majesty of God's unknowable power and glory. The best way for adults to recapture and relearn the wonder of God after age and culture numb them is to see it in children. The wonder of God will reawaken the hearts of humanity to hear His voice and see His face in all of His creation. By hearing the stories of Scripture, parents and children alike can recapture this wonder and learn what God has revealed about Himself for the purpose of drawing His people back to Him.

Verses 6-7 serve as a good summation of the purpose behind recounting the deeds of God: "That the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." As each subsequent generation speaks to the next, the stories of the faithfulness of God will continue to reach into the future indefinitely.

The ultimate purpose for this telling is that the next generation would "set their hope in God" and "not forget the works of God." A lack of hope, along with an amnesia of God's deeds, leads to the story that takes place throughout the rest of the psalm. Verses 9-72 tell the story of the Ephraimites forgetting the work of God, even as He remains faithful to them. Over and over throughout their history, Israel walks away from God and God calls them back. This same pattern is seen in every human life, which is why parents must tell these stories to their children. By telling these stories of Scripture, parents teach their children that the faithfulness of God is not tainted by the unfaithfulness of man, and that they, too, are invited to experience the effect of God's ultimate act of faithfulness in the cross of Christ.

Psalm 78 displays the significance of telling the stories of Scripture as a means of teaching the faithfulness of God. By participating in the long line of those who have shared their faith with their children through such stories, parents invite their children to

become part of the long story of God’s faithfulness to man. God’s people may be a forgetful people, but He is not a forgetful God. By simply passing on their sense of wonder at the might displayed in His deeds, parents can hope to see their faith reproduced in the hearts of their children.

Conclusion

God’s Word is clear that, from the beginning, His design was for families to be the primary vehicle—in conjunction with the local church—for declaring and living His Way of life. This is made clear in His instruction to His people in Deuteronomy 6, reinforced by Paul in Ephesians 6, and seen in numerous examples, including Joshua 24 and Psalm 78. Every believing family should feel the burden of responsibility for their children’s souls. This burden is heavy, but it is also a joy. Parents must be intentional about displaying and teaching God’s faithfulness to their children for it is the most important work of their lives. As Boice pleads, “We should struggle to make sure that our children are taught morality grounded in the character of God and supported by the life and power of our Savior Jesus Christ. We must teach this in our homes.”⁴² As the subject of practical examples and church support is next to be considered, let God’s Words continue to ring in the ear of every parent and come alive in their words and actions: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15).

⁴² Boice, *Psalms*, 646.

CHAPTER 3

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY AND CHURCH

Scripture reveals God’s intention for the family to be a primary means of carrying His truth and glory from generation to generation. Unfortunately, this divine intention is not always carried out, even by those within the church. For families to return to this holy calling, there must be a change in the way the family and church engage each other. If Scripture teaches that the family ought to be the force behind a child’s discipleship, then not only do families need to step up, but churches must also stop trying to take their responsibilities. Churches must come alongside families in ways that equip rather than replace, that empower rather than remove, that shoulder burdens together instead of taking them entirely upon institutional programming. The mindset, teaching, and life of the church must adjust just as much as the mindset, teaching, and life of the family. Only by working together, united in the cause of Christ under the intended order of God’s created plan, can families and churches successfully pass on knowledge of the glory of God to the next generation.

Ecclesial Responsibility for Family Ministry

As churches engage with families and their children, the goal ought to be empowering and equipping parents to disciple their children rather than isolating family members from each other. Churches should walk alongside parents to help them carry the burden of their children’s spiritual development rather than abdicating their authority and responsibility. Reformer Martin Luther once wrote, “Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of

parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.”¹ If parents play such a vital role in the spiritual development of their children, then why has the church worked so hard to keep them away from each other?

Much work has been done in recent years to reverse a dangerous culture in youth ministry that behaves as if its primary goal is to isolate family members from one another for their spiritual benefit. In *Family Ministry Field Guide*, Timothy Paul Jones describes the culture like this, “This is the church as the twenty-first century knows it, as the twentieth century refined it, and as the nineteenth century created it. Some persons have referred to this arrangement as a ‘silo approach,’ where hired hands provide spiritual sustenance for each age-grouping by means of separate organizational structures.”² “Silo Approach” is an appropriate name because, much like a grain silo, the idea seems to be to fill the silo as full as possible and later worry about sorting the good from the bad.

As this silo approach to ministry continued to grow and spread its influence, churches began to develop entire departments, buildings, and staff teams dedicated solely to youth and children’s ministries. The basic concept is to make church as exciting as possible so that students will want to show up. There is nothing wrong with having fun at church, but if the goal is attendance and growth, then the less exciting aspects of church are going to be slowly filtered out—including parents. As students grow into adolescence, many begin to push back against their parents’ influence, meaning that they want to be where their parents are *not*. Therefore, to get more kids in church, youth ministries began to remove them from the very people who were meant to be the primary means of their spiritual development.

¹ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 162.

² Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2011), 126.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with students being together, and there are certainly benefits to spending time with Christian peers. However, if a teenager's only interaction with the church happens when he is around people his age, then who is leading him to maturity? Teenagers are capable of incredible spiritual maturity and depth, but that can never replace the experience and wisdom an adult can bring from spending years as a believer. Mark DeVries has done great work in reversing this trend, and he explains this issue well in *Family-Based Youth Ministry* when he writes, "It is clear that young people grow to maturity in general, and to maturity in Christ in particular, by being around people who exhibit such maturity themselves."³ Christian peers and age-specific curriculum can be wonderful, but they cannot replace the power of witnessing the time-tested faith of adult believers.

Many faithful men and women have seen the problems with these now-common youth ministry practices and have done great work to combat them. This chapter looks at the work of three such men who have contributed much to the field of family ministry, and who have each given their own differing take on the solution to these problems. Mark DeVries, Timothy Paul Jones, and Voddie Baucham, Jr. are men who love the Lord, love His children, and have put great work and thought into how to best minister to families and their children. While their three approaches are different, each one can play a beneficial role in putting discipleship back into the hands of parents.

Family-Based Ministry

Mark DeVries published *Family-Based Youth Ministry* in 1994, as a result of years of thinking and tinkering with his own youth ministry. DeVries had a successful youth ministry in terms of numbers and finances, but he began to realize that his students were missing something. DeVries realized that "there is no such thing as successful youth ministry that isolates teenagers from the community of faith," and that is exactly what he

³ DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 37.

had been promoting.⁴ After nearly two decades in youth ministry at First Presbyterian in Nashville, he began meeting regularly with a group of parents to develop a concept that would come to be known as Family-Based Ministry. This concept was centered around the idea of getting teenagers to spend more time with spiritually mature adults, particularly their parents.

Much of DeVries' book deals with the issue of teenage isolation in the church. He writes, "We can find the primary cause of the current crisis in youth ministry in the way that our culture and our churches have systematically isolated young people from the very relationships that are most likely to lead them to maturity."⁵ He goes on to add, "Whatever new models for youth ministry we develop must take seriously the fact that teenagers grow toward mature Christian adulthood as they are connected to the total body of Christ, not isolated from it."⁶ DeVries follows this line of thinking to the conclusion that the best method to achieve the goal of teenagers that grow to be spiritually mature and stable adults is to place them around spiritually mature adults as often as possible. Ideally, this is their families, but it is also important to include the larger church family as well.

DeVries' proposed solution to the issues he identifies is less of a program and more of an ethos. The idea is that getting spiritually mature adults to invest in the lives of teenagers must become the culture of a church and must be communicated as often as possible. He even goes so far as to say that "family-based youth ministry is not, strictly speaking, a 'model' but rather a foundation . . . the specific model of youth ministry a church chooses is almost irrelevant."⁷ DeVries means that *what* is done specifically is far less important than *why* it is done and to what end. Any number of events, programs, and

⁴ DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 102.

⁵ DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 36.

⁶ DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 44.

⁷ DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 176.

models can be considered family-based as long as they attempt to get families and other spiritually-mature adults involved with teenagers.

What DeVries wrote in 1994 created a significant shift in the way youth ministry professionals considered their ministry. While DeVries was, admittedly, still attempting to figure out just what this concept looked like practically, the issues he addressed and the conclusions he reached were significant in getting churches and youth ministry professionals to start asking the right questions about their work with teenagers. DeVries' work was not a huge shift programmatically, but it represented the first big push toward change, leading others after him to think seriously about youth and family ministry. DeVries' work plays a strong role in influencing the next two family ministry models.

Family-Equipping Ministry

Timothy Paul Jones' concept of Family-Equipping ministry is the most moderate of the three family ministry models being considered. Jones's model, based on similar conclusions made by DeVries, attempts to reorient already existing ministries to partner with parents in the ministry of their children. While these models contain similarities, Family-Based Ministry focuses on getting students involved with adults inside church-implemented programs, whereas Family-Equipping Ministry pushes that intentional ministry back into the home.

Both ministries target teenagers' isolation from mature adults as the leading cause of church drop-out, however, Jones puts much more emphasis on the importance of parents than on spiritual mature adults in general. DeVries writes, "Everything we do in our youth ministries should be, first and foremost, about helping to give kids excuses to build connections with Christian adults."⁸ Jones does not combat this idea, but shifts the responsibility even further onto the parents, warning, "The unspoken message has been

⁸ DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 90.

that the task of discipleship is best left to trained professionals.”⁹

Another key difference between the two models is that DeVries’ solution to the problem is to plan events that intentionally invite parents and other adults to join in, whereas Jones aims to cut down on events that add busyness to a family’s calendar and focus instead on equipping parents to minister to their families through their everyday lives. He pushes back against over-programming by warning, “Eventually, families become so busy doing church that no time remains for them to be the church in their homes and communities.”¹⁰ These two models seem to be built off of the same understanding of the problem, the difference being in where they see the solution. Jones seems to agree with everything DeVries writes in his book about the problem of teenage isolation but writing nearly twenty years later gives him the insight to see that the true biblical solution is not just teenagers being around mature adults, but having them discipled by their families.

Jones provides an apt description of the problem:

The segmented-programmatic church had seemed quite successful when it came to providing lots of age-organized activities, but this bulk of programs came at a cost. Age segmentation became so systematic that the organizational structures in many churches complicated or even eliminated the possibility of different generations interacting with one another. Churches were providing parents with little encouragement and no equipping when it came to their children’s spiritual development. After all, why equip parents to do something that the church was already paying youth and children’s ministers to do?¹¹

The key to keeping kids in church, argues Jones, is not simply entertaining them, nor is it entertaining them around mature adults, it is empowering and equipping families to disciple their children in natural ways.

Of course, many kids do not come from strong Christian homes, and would consequently be at a disadvantage if parents were the only means of child-discipleship. Therefore, Jones does not call for a complete removal of age-segregated ministries, but

⁹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 83.

¹⁰ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 105.

¹¹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 128.

merely a less busy, more focused approach. He explains, “Family-equipping ministry is all about reorienting activities that are already happening so that parents are equipped to become primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives. The focus of family-equipping is not an increase in family activities, but a deepening of gospel identity.”¹²

The transition to Family-Equipping ministry is not as simple as cutting a few programs or changing organizational structures. To become a family-equipping church, the message of parents as primary disciple-makers must infiltrate every part of church life. Additionally, this model of ministry only works if individual parents buy in to their role and responsibility in their children’s lives. If programs are changed and messages preached, but families are not on board, then nothing changes. Jones adds, “Parents must aim at becoming partners in every aspect of their children’s spiritual development—including every age-organized activity that happens through the church.”¹³ The purpose behind family-equipping ministry is not to streamline or perfect programming, but for the church to partner with parents and give them the tools needed to carry out the task they have been given.

Family-Integrated Ministry

The final model of family ministry is by far the most extreme and idealistic approach. In *Family Driven Faith*, Voddie Baucham, Jr. concurs with the conclusions made by DeVries and Jones about the problems with teenage isolation and the necessity of relationships with spiritually mature adults. He also agrees with the historic failings of the segmented-programmatic approach to youth and children’s ministries and the necessity for parents to step into their God-given role as disciple-makers for their children. However, where DeVries and Jones attempt to find these solutions alongside existing structured programs, Baucham takes the hard stance of simply eradicating age-based programming.

¹² Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 132.

¹³ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 182.

To quote Baucham again, “Our children are falling away,” he assesses, “because we are asking the church to do what God designed the family to accomplish. Discipleship and multi-generational faithfulness begins and ends at home.”¹⁴

Baucham is not afraid to make harsh and difficult assessments of the current state of family ministry in the Western church. He asks, “Why are we so eager to hand the spiritual development of our young people to the first person we find who can locate the New Testament and needs a little part-time work?”¹⁵ He goes on to point out, “The largest rise of full-time youth ministers in history has been accompanied by the biggest decline in youth evangelism effectiveness.”¹⁶ He gives perhaps his most sobering assessment of the state of the modern church when he writes,

One day you visit a church, your teen goes off to the youth service, your little one goes off to children’s church, the baby goes to the nursery, and you and your spouse get a great seat in a plush auditorium with first-class music, professional drama, a relevant, encouraging, application-oriented, non-threatening talk, and you get it all in just under an hour. Moreover, you look at the brochures, and it’s right there in black and white: “Our youth ministry exists to do the job you’ve neglected all these years.” What a deal! We don’t have to keep the little one quiet, we get our needs met, and to top it off, the youth guy is going to disciple my teenager (whom I don’t even like right now). Who cares if the youth guy has only been married a few months and has never even attempted to disciple a child of his own. “Count me in!”¹⁷

While his conclusions are correct and his writing is convincing, his tone makes the biggest statement. In the above quotes, Baucham shows just how against the norm his views of family ministry are in today’s world. The extremity of his views in light of current church models makes the idea of implementing them seem so potentially difficult. Difficult does not mean wrong, however, it just means that change will not necessarily come quickly or easily.

In Baucham’s Family-Integrated ministry model, all age-segregated ministry

¹⁴ Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 9.

¹⁵ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 179.

¹⁶ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 187.

¹⁷ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 180.

programs are shut down in favor of family discipleship, which means no youth group, children's ministries, or adult Sunday School classes. Instead, families attend the worship service together, participating in elements such as the Lord's Supper and the teaching of the Word as a family. By being together through these elements of the church, families have the opportunity to learn together, worship together, grow together, and open doors to further conversation. In this way, families experience the life of the church as an actual family and not as individual units. These benefits mean that instead of growing in age-segregated silos, individual members of a family can lean on each other and walk alongside each other as they grow in the faith. In this way, families disciple one another and parents are able to set an example and pass on their real, genuine faith to their children.

Summation

Each of the views is a response to the same primary problem and draws from similar data to form their conclusions. Because of these similarities and the nature of the problem, each has its own benefits and drawbacks. As with any issue involving people, there is no "one-size fits all" solution. Each ministry model has its own merits for different situations and churches, just as each would be ineffective in different situations and churches. That is why the conclusion is not simply that one works and two do not. Family ministry is a personal issue and it requires a personal and intentional solution.

The church and family form an inseparable team in discipling children. The church is the gathering of believers for the worship of God, teaching of His Word, and fellowship with one another. The home is where the family takes the purposes of church from the sanctuary out into the world. Without the church, the family is without support and lacks a strong Christian center to their lives. However, without families taking the community, worship, and teaching of the church into their homes and into their lives, the church never engages the world with the truth of the gospel. The world needs both the church and the family, and a child needs both the church and the family.

If the problem is a lack of parental engagement in spiritual issues and a reliance

on professionally-made programs, then the best solution is going to be that which best encourages and equips parents to take responsibility for their children’s spirituality. It is not enough to simply invite parents to be part of age-segregated events, and most parents would not be prepared to have the support of such ministries completely taken away from them. The best solution is one that provides ministerial support while putting the primary focus on giving parents the training and tools necessary to accomplish the task God has given them. Richard Ross writes in *Parenting with Kingdom Purpose* that “parents are the church. Only as parents and church leaders lock arms in a committed partnership will children and teenagers experience full transformation.”¹⁸

Parental Responsibility for Family Discipleship

The ideal goal of family ministry is to return primary spiritual responsibility to parents, which means parents must come to properly understand what their spiritual role ought to look like. This shift from professional to parental discipleship can only be successful if parents are equipped with a deeper understanding of gospel-centered parenting. James Waddel Alexander, American minister and son of Great Awakening pastor Archibald Alexander, states this necessity well in *Thoughts on Family Worship*: “But above all does the Christian parent need something to keep him constantly in remembrance that his children have souls; that they look to him for more than their earthly support, and that there are means whereby, under God, he may be the instrument of their salvation.”¹⁹

For parents to better understand their spiritual responsibility, they must first find a gospel-centered, authentic faith for themselves. While this may seem to be a simple or obvious point, it cannot be overlooked and must be adequately addressed. The hope is

¹⁸ Ken Hemphill and Richard Ross, *Parenting with Kingdom Purpose* (Nashville: B & H, 2005), 119.

¹⁹ James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 22.

that children will adopt the faith practices of their parents. Unfortunately, this includes nominalism. Hemphill and Ross warn, “We cannot be a Kingdom people or raise Kingdom-focused children until we have a personal relationship with the King. Many church members who resist the demands to become Kingdom-focused may be ‘Cultural Christians’ who have never been truly redeemed.”²⁰

Unfortunately, it is all too common for parents to desire something in their children that they do not have in themselves. Religion, and particularly Christianity, is seen as being able to produce moral children who are productive members of society. Oftentimes that is the most parents want from their children. “Many parents aren’t discipling their children because they have never been disciplined,” writes Timothy Paul Jones. He continues, “They’ve never learned how the gospel applies in their everyday lives, including their parenting practices.”²¹ It is not difficult to see how parents who do not experience the richness of the gospel of the kingdom in their own lives will not be able to adequately reproduce it in their children. Baucham suggests, “The most effective way to make disciples of teens is to make disciples of their parents and teach them to do what God commands, which includes evangelizing and discipling their children.”²² While family ministry is often born out of a desire to reach children, it must always start by discipling and equipping parents.

Even redeemed, spiritually strong parents can and will make mistakes in their parenting, which is perhaps seen most often in the goals and definitions of success that parents have for their children. It is all too easy to love the Lord, but pursue worldly idols of success through finances, sports, careers, and relationships. Baucham points out, “There seems to be an increasing emphasis on our children achieving the ‘American

²⁰ Hemphill and Ross, *Parenting with Kingdom Purpose*, 12.

²¹ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 82.

²² Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 188.

Dream' at the expense of any sort of costly Christian commitment. It is as though we have forgotten that this is not our home, that the best this world has to offer pales in comparison to what God has in store for us."²³

Later in his book, Baucham presents a sobering picture of the reality in which many Christian families find themselves:

Religious congregations are losing out to school and the media for the time and attention of youth. When it comes to the formation of the lives of youth, viewed sociologically, faith communities typically get a very small seat at the end of the table for a very limited period of time. The youth-formation table is dominated structurally by more powerful and vocal actors. Hence . . . most teens know details about television characters and pop stars, but many are quite vague about Moses and Jesus. Most youth are well versed about the dangers of drunk driving, AIDS, and drugs, but many haven't a clue about their own tradition's core ideas. Many parents also clearly prioritize homework and sports over church or youth group attendance.²⁴

This unfortunate reality has had a large impact on the state of the church, and the young people ultimately pay the price. There is nothing wrong with succeeding at sports, making money, being in a relationship, or even doing homework, but when parents allow those activities and pursuits to trump church attendance and the Christian life, the subtle message they are sending is that God is only a marginal part of life. To quote Baucham once again, "There are many worthwhile pursuits in this world, but few of them rise to the level of training our children to follow the Lord and keep His commandments."²⁵ Parents must ask themselves what they believe is most important for their children and how their actions communicate that truth.

Gospel-centered, kingdom-focused parents will desire nothing more or less than for their children to be active, full members of the kingdom of God—regardless of what that means for their worldly success. Every interaction is an opportunity to point a child to God; every moment is a gift from God to be used to further His glory. The real

²³ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 43.

²⁴ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 13.

²⁵ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 32.

successes for children are their growth in the fruit of God’s Spirit. A child’s benevolence is more important than his baseball stats, her love is more valuable than her looks, and their goodness and gentleness is more valuable than their grades.

This mindset impacts every interaction between parent and child, but it also requires intentional guidance through formative habits such as Scripture reading, prayer, and spiritual discussions. These interactions, of course, must start with the parents. Baucham urges, “We cannot expect our children to rise above our example. If my kids don’t see me spending time in God’s Word, they probably won’t. . . . We can try to teach them to do as we say, not as we do, but our words can only go so far when they are contradicted by our actions.”²⁶ It is crucial for parents to first practice what they desire to see formulated in their children.

It is important to remember, however, that this formation is not simply accomplished by binding children under a variety of rules and laws. Scripture provides evidence that law is not sufficient enough to change the heart. If parents teach their children to follow rules, but never teach them the heart of why the rule matters, then the moment the children are no longer under the oversight of his parents they are likely to give up the rule as a relic of childhood. Thus, parents must take every available opportunity to shape a child’s worldview rather than further boxing them in with legalism.

Two practical methods for parents to address the faith of their children are family worship, and what Timothy Paul Jones calls a “faith talk.” Family worship will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. Jones defines a faith talk as a “designated time, at least once per week, for the household to gather for prayer and to study a biblical truth together. This household gathering may include not only parents and children but also other individuals who have been invited to share this time with the family.”²⁷ These

²⁶ Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 40.

²⁷ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 154.

intentional faith talks can create opportunities for children to ask difficult questions that they might not have the courage to ask on their own and to wrestle with the way their Christian worldview is different than the worldview they see in the culture around them.

However, parents do not need to rely solely on planned “talks” in order to influence their children’s faith. As Deuteronomy 6 implies, parents ought to take advantage of everyday moments with their children to pass on their Christian worldview and teach them how to practice their faith. Each day is full of opportunities to teach children how to pray, read Scripture, and practice the love of God better. While curriculums and catechisms can be helpful, parents should not rely solely on a formal program. The goal, rather, is for parents to simply pass on what they already have; namely, their faith in and reliance on Christ.

There is no one, foolproof plan or practice to guarantee salvation in the life of a child, but for parents to have a chance at seeing their children saved, they first must possess genuine faith themselves. When a parent’s entire being is shaped by the gospel, then the lens through which they see the world is changed, and every moment and interaction becomes an opportunity to point to God. They must then be on the lookout for intentional opportunities and practices to pass on their faith.

Families must change the way they engage with the church, seeing it as a partner and a resource rather than as a crutch and a replacement for themselves. Likewise, the church must alter the way it engages the family, seeing the parent’s faith as the most important tool in the discipleship of a child. Every interaction with the family, whether in men’s and women’s ministries, children’s ministries, or even corporate worship, ought to focus on coming alongside and equipping parents, and striving to push families together rather than further removing them from each other’s spiritual lives.

The Practice of Family Worship

The interaction of church and family is a rhythmic cycle, ebbing from corporate to household and back again. This simply means that as families practice their faith, they

will have times when they do that with a larger corporate body and times that they will do that as an individual household. What happens in the corporate setting serves to support, equip, and encourage what occurs in the home. What is practiced in the home is meant to build up to the moment when multiple households gather together in corporate worship. One of the most useful practices for building family faith that overflows into healthy corporate worship is the daily practice of family worship.

Family worship is the disciplined practice of a family's regular, daily gathering together around the Word of God. Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean of the School of Theology at Southern Seminary, Donald S. Whitney, writes, "While there is no direct, explicit commandment in Scripture about family worship, the Bible clearly implies that God deserves to be worshipped daily in our homes by our families."²⁸ While family worship was long understood to be a normal practice for God-fearing families throughout both Scripture and church history, it has lost its place in modern Western Christian practice. Addressing the practice of Family Worship throughout history, James Waddel Alexander adds,

Instead of consuming their leisure hours in vacant idleness, or deriving their chief amusement from boisterous merriment, the recital of tales of superstition, or the chanting of the profane songs of the heathen, they passed their hours of repose in rational and enlivening pursuits; found pleasure in enlarging their religious knowledge, and entertainment in songs that were dedicated to the praise of God. These formed their pastime in private, and their favourite recreations at their family and friendly meetings.²⁹

Alexander goes on to describe these practices occurring three times every day: morning, noon, and evening. Sadly, this is a far cry from the practices of modern Christian households.

Many parents are afraid to implement family worship for the same reasons they prefer not to have their children with them in a corporate worship service: crowd control.

²⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 15.

²⁹ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 5-6.

However, it is the responsibility of the parents, and particularly the father as head of the household, to instruct children in the ways of godly worship. Alexander instructs the head of the household to “take care that none of the family withdraws himself from any part of family worship.”³⁰ He continues to elaborate on the heaviness of this burden: “There is no member of a household whose individual piety is of such importance to all the rest, as the father or head. . . . Where the head of a family is lukewarm or worldly, he will send the chill through the whole house.”³¹

The practice of family worship is critically important to the spiritual liveliness of a household and one of the most effective and practical means of discipling one’s family. Baucham writes, “Regular family worship shows the children that their parents believe that Jesus Christ is central to all of life. This practice leaves a legacy that will benefit thousands of generations to come.”³² By practicing family worship together, parents demonstrate that Christianity is not a marginal aspect of life, but the central and all-consuming reality in which their family lives.

Family worship not only daily points family members to God, it also helps draw family members to one another and, in doing so, battles the cultural individualism which threatens to drive a wedge between them. Alexander shows the blessings and benefits of this practice by reminding families that when they participate in worship together in the home “every individual is blessed. Each one receives a portion of the heavenly food.”³³ Unbridled individualism can be a difficult, even seemingly impossible, barrier to the importance of this time.

³⁰ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 6.

³¹ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 13.

³² Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 100.

³³ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 13.

Pastor of Grace Christian Fellowship in Spokane, Washington, William P.

Farley warns in *Gospel-Powered Parenting*,

Individualism can be the enemy of family devotions. Individualism is rampant in our culture. It can make a regular family meal almost impossible, especially when your children enter their teens. You cannot have regular family devotions unless each member of the family is willing to subordinate his or her personal desires to the greater good of the family.³⁴

Because of this tendency toward individualism, it is urgent that fathers, as the head of their household, take up this burden and responsibility to mandate family worship when their children are young. Too often, families struggle to begin implementing this practice in older children when individualism is often already rampant in attitudes and worldview. Farley continues, “Selfish individualism is the unwillingness to sacrifice my wants for the good of the larger social unit, in this case the family. It is important to teach your children that the family is more important than their individual pursuits.”³⁵

It is not just individualism that family worship helps to combat, but an entire army of worldly and cultural influences that threaten to lead children away from faith in God. Alexander provides encouragement for the benefits of family worship: “Establish the worship of God in any house, and you erect around it a new barrier against the irruption of the world, the flesh, and the devil.”³⁶

How, then, should family worship be implemented? In his helpful book *Family Worship*, Donald Whitney sums up the answer to this question as, “Read, Pray, and Sing.”³⁷ This simple practice is as beneficial to a child’s spiritual development as it is easy to remember. This simplicity is an encouragement to parents who feel overwhelmed by the weight of this task and a reminder that God’s Spirit instructs and provides growth.

³⁴ William P. Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 189.

³⁵ Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 189.

³⁶ Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, 20.

³⁷ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 44.

At the end of the day, it is the parent's job to simply point to the work God is already doing. Again, this is done by reading, praying, and singing.

First, simply reading Scripture as a family has a profound effect on the faith of a child. Through the simple reading of Scripture, children hear the divine Word spoken every day and receive the benefit of hearing the teachings of Scripture in its entirety. Many parents may fear that Scripture is too heavy for their young children and wish to express the same truths in simpler terms. Whitney encourages families to begin with narratives and shorter sections with younger children, but to set a goal of reading the whole Bible as children grow older. By reading Scripture, parents become the mediator of God's Word to their children's hearts.

Second, families are to pray together. There is great flexibility in this practice: families can pray from a list of requests, various members can offer to give the prayer, or families can pray through the psalms. What is important is that prayer is a central element to the gathering of the family.

Finally, families ought to sing together. Singing seems to be the most neglected practice of the three and is seen as the most dispensable. However, music has a special way of touching the heart, and singing theologically-sound songs as a family binds those family members together around the truth of God. Children are influenced daily by songs on the radio and jingles on tv, why should the family not make it a priority to teach them the great songs of the faith?

Of course other practices can also be implemented in this time. Whitney encourages parents to keep this time flexible, yet regular. Families can use this time to catechize, memorize, and even read other books together.³⁸ What is most important for the praxis of family worship is (1) the regular, daily gathering that is (2) centered around reading Scripture, praying, and singing.

³⁸ Whitney, *Family Worship*, 48-49.

In a world of streamlined solutions and professional answers, family worship can feel like an archaic, outdated, or even unpleasant concept. Families would rather take their children to someone who can fix them quickly rather than add one more thing to their plate. However, the best solution to an overcrowded plate is not to outsource a child's Christian development, but rather to remove other things on the plate. If a family is going to be serious about discipling their children in the ways of Christ, it will necessitate a daily, gradual, and intentional process of taking advantage of every God-given moment and opportunity. Family worship helps to center a family's schedule around worship and the Word as parents walk alongside their children in the ways of God.

Many Christian families simply want the best for their children. It would be a truly corrupt parent who desired to see their children fail. However, Christian parents must realize that the burden of discipleship for their children falls on them. In true family discipleship, the church functions *in conjunction* with parents, not as their replacement. As families and the church develop a proper relationship and engage each other in healthy ways, children will learn to worship God at home with their family, in the corporate setting with the church body, and eventually in their own lives as they pursue God with all their heart, soul, and strength.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

Introduction

Based on Scripture's teaching that God has ordained parents to be the primary disciple makers in the lives of their family and the relevant literature to support this teaching, the purpose of this project was to equip the families of Washington Heights Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, to become the primary disciplers of their families. This purpose was accomplished in three stages. The first stage of the project was to assess the current discipleship practices among families at Washington Heights by administering Timothy Paul Jones' Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey.¹ The second stage was to create a curriculum based on the teachings of Scripture and relevant literature to adequately train and equip parents to disciple their families. This curriculum was evaluated by a panel of ministry professionals before being delivered to the class. The final stage was to implement this curriculum through a four-week Family Discipleship class that took place on Sunday mornings. Upon implementation of the curriculum, the same survey was re-administered as a means of analyzing the course's effectiveness.

Stage 1

The project was initially promoted at the annual Parent's Meeting on November 3, 2019. These meetings are used to inform the parents of Washington Heights of what is happening in both the children's and student ministries. During this meeting, the purpose of the project was described, the upcoming Family Discipleship class was promoted, and

¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2011), 201-3.

parents were informed that they would be receiving the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey in the mail by Sunday, December 1, 2019. Because of the holidays, parents were given until Sunday, January 5, 2020, to submit their surveys. The class began the following Sunday, January 12, and ran for four weeks until February 2. The church bulletin contained weekly reminders for parents to complete the survey, while a reminder email was sent to all parents on December 30.

The completed surveys were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics to evaluate the mean scores and observe any outliers. The survey included a six-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The first eight questions sought to understand parents’ perceptions and beliefs of family discipleship, primarily in the areas of family worship (questions 1-3), intentional spiritual engagement and discipleship roles (questions 4-6), and dynamics of the family/church relationship (questions 7-8). The last eight questions quantified the way families practice family discipleship by asking for the frequency of relevant activities, including spiritual conversations (questions 11, 12, 14, and 16), family worship and Bible reading (questions 11 and 13), and family patterns and habits (questions 10 and 12).

Parents scored above average on both quantitative sections of the survey, grading overall a 4.78 for perceptions and a 3.7 for practices. There were also no outliers in the answers. The standard deviation was .87 for perceptions and 1.2 for practices. While there was not a direct correlation between the questions in each section—where an answer to a perceptions question would explain an answer to a practices question—the most significant result of the data was discovering that parents “know” the right answers more than they practice them.

While the results for perceptions were fairly strong across all eight questions, parents scored better and more consistently in their understanding of intentional spiritual engagement and discipleship roles (questions 4-6) than in the other two sections. The

lowest and least consistent scores came in the section about family worship. Out of the 242 answers across all eight questions, only four answers scored a “1,” while 85 scored a “6.”

The practices section scored slightly lower and a bit less consistently. The diversity in answers is perhaps best displayed by the fact that of the 246 answers, a “6” was answered the highest number of times at 54, while a “1” was answered the second highest at 48 (tied with “5”).² This small gap in total number of answers mixed with a large gap in the meaning of the answer reveals that there is a large diversity in the frequency of the parent’s practices. Even though the average score was slightly above average at 3.7, there was a significant gap between the highest scoring answers, “How many times in the past month have I read or discussed the Bible with my children?” and “How many times in the past month have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?” (scoring a 4.9 and 4.8, respectively) and the lowest scoring answers, “How many times in the past year have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?” and “How often in the past year have I discussed my children’s spiritual development with a church leader?” (scoring a 2.1 and 1.9, respectively.)

To better create an understanding of each family’s views on family discipleship and the relationship between the family and the church, the survey also included a series of qualitative questions.³ After sharing the names and ages of all their children, parents were asked how long they had been a follower of Christ, how long they had attended church, and whether they currently served in the church in any capacity. Out of the 60 parents at Washington Heights who completed a survey, only 3 did not grow up attending church, reading the Bible, and hearing Christian teaching. This reveals that the desire to

² The reason for the difference in total number of answers is a result of some answers being left blank.

³ See appendix 1.

raise children in the church has largely been influenced by the fact that these parents grew up with parents who desired the same things in them. This is not entirely surprising given the strong generational family dynamics at Washington Heights described in chapter 1.

The parents were then asked whether they would describe their family life as busy, what they expect from their own involvement in church, and what they expect from their children's involvement in church. The answers to these questions were varied, as would be expected, but three major themes surfaced. Throughout nearly all the surveys, parents indicated that their spiritual goals for their children were to grow in the Lord, belong to a strong Christian community, and serve in the church. Furthermore, these goals and desires seemed to be interconnected. This was made clearer through discussions with parents during the class. The parents at Washington Heights want to see their children grow in the Lord, and they believe the best opportunity for that to happen is by participating in and serving a strong body of believers. These are important goals for any family desiring for their children to grow in the Lord.

However, the primary focus of the class was to not simply rely on belonging to a strong community for their children's spiritual growth, but for parents to be intentional and proactive in discipling their children in the ways of the Lord. When church involvement and community—whether found in serving, programs, or activities—becomes relied upon for spiritual growth instead of parental discipleship parents risk seeing their children become good churchgoers and lousy Jesus followers.

While this refined understanding of the family discipleship perceptions and practices of the families at Washington Heights did not lead to wholesale change of the planned curriculum, it did lead to a few appropriate tweaks and additions. For example, several suggested resources were included and discussion questions were added to the planned outline, such as, How do you build community in a church setting? How is that community beneficial to spiritual growth? How does serving help build community? and

How can parents use these areas of community and service to more intentionally disciple their children?⁴

Stage 2

The curriculum for the Family Discipleship class was broken into four sections: “God’s Plan for our Families,” “Spiritual Conversations,” “Worship at Home,” and “Family & the Church.” Each class included biblical exegesis as the primary teaching to ensure that families would be taught directly from God’s Word rather than merely the teacher’s opinions. Throughout the teaching of Scripture, several discussion questions were used to further engage parents with the content. Participants sat at round tables in a large room to better promote this discussion. The purpose of discussion was not merely to engage head knowledge, but to build relationships between families and create better accountability that would last beyond the duration of the class.

Each class ended with a practical homework assignment, which was discussed at the beginning of each subsequent class. This homework was given so that parents would have a tangible means of putting what they were learning into practice. On top of the homework given to the parents, the student and children’s ministry programs also took time to pray each week for their parents who were attempting to grow in their discipling efforts. The intention of having the students and children pray for their parents was partly to soften their own hearts toward their parents’ attempts to disciple them and to engage the whole family in spiritual growth.

Lastly, each class ended with a list of relevant suggested resources that would help parents deepen their understanding of the topic. This list was emailed to the parents at the end of the course and several of the books were given to parents in the class who participated in discussion or showed that they might especially benefit from a book’s teaching.

⁴ See appendix 3 for full curriculum outline.

Rubric

Before being implemented, the curriculum was evaluated by a panel of six ministry professionals using a rubric.⁵ This panel consisted of Mike Tuttle, a senior pastor with experience pastoring both student and children’s ministries; Alia Edem, the children’s director at Washington Heights; Michelle Osmanski, a children’s pastor; Jason Beaver, a student pastor with children’s ministry experience; Adam Leopard, a discipleship pastor with youth ministry experience; and Shane Hawkins, another local youth pastor.

The rubric included four primary sections and six questions. The four sections were Biblical Faithfulness, Scope, Methodology, and Practicality. Biblical Faithfulness measured how well and accurately the curriculum exegeted scripture. Scope measured the curriculum’s breadth of the subject matter. “Methodology” measured the variety of its approaches. The last section, “Practicality,” measured how applicable the curriculum was and how well it equipped parents to better practice family discipleship.

After the panel evaluation, slight adjustments were made to the curriculum. These adjustments included rewording questions as well as added resources. More significantly, the advice of the panel assisted in rearranging some of the passages to better fit the specific topics as well as better fleshing out some of the exegetical conclusions. With full approval of the expert panel, as well as the necessary adjustments to the curriculum, the class was ready to begin.⁶

Session 1

The first class was “God’s Plan for Our Families” and covered the scriptural basics of family discipleship. The class opened with an introductory overview of the entire series, which was led by the discussion question: “Who were the most significant people in your spiritual development?” The purpose of this question was for parents to

⁵ See appendix 2.

⁶ This goal was considered successful when every member of the panel found each section to at least meet expectations.

begin thinking about what and who had most influenced their faith either positively or negatively. This discussion was followed by a class overview and a brief description of this doctoral project.

The teaching began in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 with a discussion of the meaning of the Shema and its relevance in the lives of Christian families. The purpose of beginning with this passage was to impart upon parents the significance of what it means for God to be the central focus of their lives and to show them that their actions—as individuals and parents—reveals what is truly most important to them. The parents were given a chance to discuss at their tables with a metaphorical question: “If the most important thing in your life was the Ohio State Buckeyes, what would practically show that in your life? How would you show by your actions that OSU was more important than anything else?” This question was followed by the related question, “In the same way, what would it look like for God to be central to your life?”.

After these discussions, I moved into a teaching of verses 7-9 and Moses’ practical advice for how families should live out fully devoted lives to YHWH. The teaching was simplified into four points: Teach, Talk, Wear, and Write. Using these four points, parents were then asked to discuss how to make Moses’ teaching practical for their families and homes. After finishing in Deuteronomy, Ephesians 6:1-4 was used to show a New Testament perspective of family discipleship, and, specifically, how Paul instructed families to behave.

Class ended with a summary statement that the most important thing parents can teach their children is to love God and that the primary burden of that responsibility lies with the parents themselves. Couples were given the homework assignment of spending fifteen minutes each day praying together for the spiritual health of their children.

Session 2

The purpose of session 2 was to discuss the topic of Spiritual Conversations and give practical advice for how parents could and should use conversations to develop their

children’s worldview and love of God. After a brief recap of week 1 and a review of the assigned homework, class began with a game called Word Sneak.⁷ The purpose of this game was not simply to be an ice breaker, but to also show parents how conversations can be steered—if sometimes awkwardly—around specific, and sometimes random, words.

After this introduction, the main teaching of the class began with a discussion about Family Rhythms, a phrase I used to represent the habits and patterns of family life in which parents can include discussion about spiritual matters. This phrase was used frequently throughout the curriculum to describe the different ways that each household lives and interacts with each other and the world. Families were given an opportunity to discuss with their tables what they felt were some of their family rhythms.

After explaining and discussing Family Rhythms, two passages of Scripture were used to show the significance of using conversations as a way to disciple children. Through Psalm 78, the class learned the importance of passing on “God stories” as a means of teaching their children about the mighty deeds of God. Parents were encouraged to tell these God stories in the form of reading Scripture before bed or even teaching Bible stories throughout the day. However they are used, God stories can teach children to have an awe for God that leads them to worship and trust in Him alone.

The second passage, Deuteronomy 6:20-25, revealed the importance of parents sharing their own honest and personal stories of faith their children. By showing how God has acted in their lives, parents help their children see His power, love, and might as real and present helps in their modern lives. The teaching of these passages was followed by a discussion question asking parents to think about a meaningful spiritual conversation in their lives and what made it meaningful for them.

⁷ Adapted from The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, “Word Sneak with Steve Carell,” October 9, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nBBgD0q6rA>.

The final portion of the class was dedicated to giving parents practical advice for how to engage their children in spiritual conversations. Parents were advised to be honest with their children rather than avoiding a difficult conversation, to speak from their own experience and be willing to admit when they do not know an answer, and to respond rather than reacting. Parents were encouraged to prayerfully be on the lookout for opportunities for spiritual conversations every time they were with their children. This portion of teaching included the discussion questions, “What opportunities in your family rhythms are there for spiritual conversations?” and “What topics are you afraid your children will ask about?” Again, the purpose of these questions was primarily to create honest conversation and accountability between families.

The class concluded with a summary of the material, which was that parents ought to be proactive in developing their children’s worldview and faith, rather than leaving it in the hands of others. Families were given the homework assignment to have at least one spiritual conversation with each of their children during the week. After class, several parents stayed behind to discuss and pray about specific difficult issues in the lives of their families that they would need to discuss with their children.

Session 3

The third class was about “Worship at Home,” which sought to reveal to families the idols of culture that they might unintentionally worship while also teaching them to build family rhythms that direct their lives and worship to YHWH. After reviewing the previous week’s lesson, the homework was reviewed, and many parents revealed that they had made an effort to have intentional conversations with their children. Through this exercise, many were reminded that one conversation does not solve all of their problems and saw the need to make spiritual conversations a continual part of their family rhythms.

The passages explored in this session were Deuteronomy 6:10-15 and Joshua 24:14-15, 27. The passage in Deuteronomy takes place in the same context as

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 20-25, which was studied the previous two weeks, meaning that its message flows directly from the Shema and its statement of the centrality of YHWH as God alone. In these verses, God gives His people hope that when they enter the Promised Land they will find homes and vineyards and cities already built and ready for them. However, that message of hope is followed by a warning that Israel not lose sight of God in the midst of their comfort. God's unasked question in this passage is, "When you no longer depend on me in the desert, will you still love and fear me?" This question is incredibly valid for modern Western Christians and proved to be a powerful challenge for the parents in this class.

It can be easy for Christians to forget that they rely on God for every single thing in their lives. As the world around them worships the gods of consumerism and comfort, many Christians, and sometimes especially parents, can seek comfort in financial security rather than in the fear of the Lord. After discussing the implications of this passage, the parents discussed what gods are worshipped in the culture around them and how they might potentially fall into worshipping those gods as a family. The point of this discussion was for families to think about the ways they were raising their children to worship the gods of culture rather than YHWH.

Joshua 24 takes place after the fulfillment of God's promise to the people in Deuteronomy 6. They are living in houses they did not build and eating from vineyards they did not plant, and the moment comes for them to decide whether they will serve and rely on YHWH God or on the gods of the Canaanites. This is when Joshua makes a stand for his family's worship and says, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15). This led to the hypothetical discussion of what Joshua might have done to ensure his families dedication to YHWH. What habits and rhythms did his family practice to keep them from worshipping false gods? Parents were then asked to discuss what rhythms they needed to establish as a family to stand firm for their faith like Joshua. What reminders could be set in the home to continually point their family back to God?

The remainder of the class was spent describing and practicing one such rhythm—Family Worship. Using Donald Whitney’s book *Family Worship*, the class learned that creating a pattern of worship at home is as simply as following three steps: read, pray, and sing.⁸ Many parents admitting to having tried various devotionals with their families to varying levels of success. Of those who had attempted such practices, many were initially skeptical that practicing family worship would yield any different results. These parents were relieved to hear that family worship need not last longer than ten to fifteen minutes, requires no strenuous preparation, and is more reliant on consistency than competency for effectiveness. This simplicity freed parents to confidently give family worship a try.

After describing in detail what is meant by read, pray, and sing, the whole class experienced and participated in family worship together while I read a passage, prayed, and led the group in a song. After practicing family worship, four guidelines were given to help families better put it to practice: brevity, consistency, everybody, and engage. Parents were taught to keep family worship *brief*—though not rushed—and to establish it as a regular and *consistent* daily pattern. These first two principles are the foundations of making family worship a doable blessing and not an additional burden. Parents were also told that *everyone* in the house ought to be included and that the whole family ought to be *engaged*, which might mean allowing older children to play a role in worship or utilizing various other creative ideas.

Because family worship is not a commonly held practice within the modern church, families were asked to discuss at their tables what they saw as potential barriers to implementing regular family worship in their homes. Those listening were asked to provide support and encouragement for one another as they considered making it part of

⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 44-51.

their family rhythms. Class ended with a homework assignment in which parents were challenged to hold family worship every single day that week.

Session 4

The fourth and final class considered the relationship between the family and the church. Because the first three weeks focused so heavily on returning the role of discipleship back to the parents, it was important to discuss what role the church body has in the spiritual growth of families and how parents can utilize that support without taking advantage of it. Class began with a recap of the previous week and a homework check. In addition to seeing which families held family worship every night that week, parents were also asked if they had identified any unhealthy areas of worship in their family life and what they were doing to correct it. Many parents were very honest about the ways their families worship the gods of culture and were also proactive in establishing healthy rhythms to break that idolatry.

Parents were given four ways that they could work together with their church community to raise their children in the ways of God: community accountability, community responsibility, community rhythm, and community example. The term *community* was intentionally repetitive, because remembering that the church is first and foremost a community of believers and not merely an institution is foundational to these principles.

The first two ways, *accountability* and *responsibility*, addressed the need for families to find and support other families. Community accountability is the reality that parents need others in the church body to whom they are accountable—people who will ask about their personal discipleship as well as their family’s spiritual growth. By learning about community responsibility, parents learned that they needed to take ownership of their church body by holding other families accountable to discipleship in the same ways they wanted to be held accountable. Parents were then asked to discuss where they find accountability and support within the church body.

In addition to being held accountable and responsible for one other's families, parents also considered their need for community *rhythms*, or reminders within corporate church life that would encourage and support them in their family discipleship. Using the example of Joshua's stone of witness in Joshua 24, families were asked what the church community could do to make the discussion of family discipleship a model and constant expectation of Washington Heights rather than just a one-time discussion.

Finally, parents learned how important it was for their children to see the strong community *example* of faithful Christ followers within the church. Having opportunities to see the church in action, rather than simply being left in the children's ministry, will help children grow in their understanding of what it means to be part of a church body. One example of this at Washington Heights is quarterly Family Worship Sunday, when the children's ministry is shut down and families are encouraged to bring their children into worship with them. Children need a strong example of worship in the corporate church, as well as daily worship in their homes, to fully show them what it means to worship God with their lives.

In addition to worship, serving and fellowshiping with Christian adults and families other than their own is a vital part of a child's spiritual growth. While Washington Heights is an intergenerational church, too often those generations are kept separate. Parents were asked to consider how to overcome the barriers of age by implementing intentional intergenerational ministry that might set a strong example of faith for children in the church.

At the end of class, parents were given an assignment to reach out to another member of the church body for the purpose of having a conversation about the spiritual health of their families. This ended with a conclusion of the series by way of summary and thanks. Post-surveys were then handed out to each family, and instruction was given to complete the surveys and return them to the church office by Sunday, March 1, giving them a month to put what they had learned into practice.

Stage 3

The Family Discipleship Class was held on Sunday mornings for four weeks from January 12 to February 2, 2020. Class met during first service, beginning at 9 a.m. and ending at 10:30 a.m. Parents were given ten to fifteen minutes to arrive and settle in before class began in earnest. Because the format of this class broke families from their regular ABF routines, a member of the different ABFs represented was asked to begin class each week with church announcements and prayer while an attendance sheet was passed between the tables. Round tables were used to better facilitate discussion and build relationships among families. Additionally, each week's teaching was supplemented with a slideshow containing the main points, Scripture passages, discussion questions, and additional resources.

During the first week, class met in the same room that held the initial parent's meeting in November. However, it became quickly apparent that the room would not be large enough to comfortably hold everyone as 75 individuals attended the first week. For the sake of better discussion and airflow, the dividing wall was opened for the remaining three weeks, more than doubling the size of the room, and several more round tables were added.

Upon the completion of the course, post-surveys were administered and received back by March 1, 2020. Of the 30 participants who initially completed their pre-surveys, only 14 were able to be used in the post-survey analysis. This is partly due to some who were unable to participate in all four weeks of the course, as well as others who did not complete their post-surveys. The collection of post-course surveys was complicated in part due to the coronavirus pandemic that occurred early in 2020, resulting in the closure of our church gatherings for a period of several weeks. However, the goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-survey results: $t_{(13)} = -5.608, p < .0001$.

Conclusion

Each of the project goals met or exceeded expectations. First, the pre-course survey revealed the current perceptions and practices of family discipleship by the families at Washington Heights. Second, the created curriculum was found to meet or exceed expectations by a panel of professional experts in family ministry. Finally, a *t*-test for dependent variables revealed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-survey results, indicating that the curriculum successfully made a difference in the lives of the parents of Washington Heights and assisted in their effective family discipleship. The final chapter will include a detailed analysis of this project's results.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to show parents at Washington Heights Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, that responsibility for their children's discipleship lies primarily with them. The project also sought to train parents to better perform that responsibility and disciple their children well in the ways of God. This chapter will analyze and evaluate the outcome of the project and its methods to determine whether this project was successful. In this chapter I first evaluate the project's purpose and goals. Next, I consider the strengths and weaknesses of the project and what I might have done differently. Finally, the chapter concludes with both theological and personal reflections based on the completion of the project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The motive behind this project was a desire to see students develop genuine lives of faith in Christ. The best chance of this goal being accomplished—of being a successful youth pastor—has less to do with what I am teaching students week in and week out, and far more to do with how their parents are training them in their homes. This means helping parents see that while they think they are responsibly giving their children the best chance to flourish in spiritual growth by leaving it up to the church staff, instead they may be inadvertently enabling their children to make faith a secondary priority in their lives. By following the mandate of Scripture and making faith in YHWH the central theme of the home, parents can successfully give their children the best chance to make their faith in God genuine and allow it to permeate their entire lives.

The purpose of this project was to equip the parents of Washington Heights Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, to become the primary disciplers of their families. This purpose aligns with Scripture's teaching for parents to take on the burden of training their children in the Lord (Josh 24:15; Eph 6:1-4). Furthermore, Scripture reveals that this training is best done in the ordinary setting of the home (Deut 6:4-9). This purpose was to be accomplished by meeting three goals.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

It was necessary for this project to meet three goals to be considered successful. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship perceptions and practices among families at Washington Heights. The second goal was to develop a curriculum to train, equip, and encourage families at Washington Heights to intentionally disciple their children. The final goal was to change the perceptions and practices of family discipleship among the families of Washington Heights by implementing the developed curriculum in a four-week parenting course. These goals will be evaluated below.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the current discipleship perceptions and practices among families at Washington Heights. This goal was achieved by administering a pre-course survey among all families in the church. The survey was mailed and made available to every family in the church and was completed and returned by thirty families. Despite only having 30 families complete the pre-survey, class attendance included over 85 individuals.¹

The survey used for assessing current discipleship practices was the Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey, borrowed from Timothy Paul Jones in his

¹ The cumulative attendance over the four weeks included over 85 unique individuals. Each survey was completed by a family unit, meaning the 30 pre-surveys completed represented 60 people. There were more participants in the course than completed the surveys.

book *Family Ministry Field Guide*.² While the survey was helpful in determining the needed information, the families at Washington Heights scored far higher than I expected. While my first priority was the growth of the participants rather than the statistical success of the project, upon receiving the initial scores, I was concerned that there was not enough room for significant statistical improvement. The reality of these initial high scores raises two questions regarding the usefulness of the survey and the entirety of the first goal: Did participants score themselves higher—either because it was an anonymous survey or because they completed it with their spouse—than was realistically true? Or, did the families at Washington Heights have a better understanding of family discipleship than I initially gave them credit for?

While it is probable that some families scored themselves more optimistically than realistically in a few areas—that is human nature—the interactions and discussions in the class revealed that these parents were not bluffing about their high Perception scores. By and large, the parents at Washington Heights have a strong understanding of their proper role in discipling their families. What they lacked was practical advice and encouragement to practice it.

When I began this process, I arrogantly assumed that parents knew little and cared less about the necessity of their involvement in their child’s spiritual development and that they merely wanted professional ministers to do all of the work for them. This project helped to change my arrogant assumptions, while deeply humbling me in the process. First, as a parent, I have learned firsthand how easy it can be to give into the path of least resistance and aim for behavior modification over life-change. Second, this project provided the opportunity to have heartfelt conversations with genuine parents who want the best for their children’s spiritual growth but were simply at the end of their ropes. These two experiences, along with the test scores coming back higher than I had

² Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2011), 201-3.

anticipated, have softened my approach with parents, teaching me that most parents in churches are in need of education more than mere chastisement.

The post-survey results showed statistically significant growth, meaning that despite my fears about my initial expectations being proven wrong, there was still room for growth for each participating family—as there is for every family. The first goal was successfully accomplished.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop a curriculum to train, equip, and encourage families at Washington Heights to intentionally disciple their children. The overall concepts for the curriculum were developed in the writing of the project, but the specific outlines and manuscripts were finalized in the two weeks following the reception of the pre-surveys. While I had a firm idea of what the main points of the curriculum would be, the analysis of the surveys guided me to emphasize certain points, such as the importance of church community and the practical elements of family worship.

Four driving goals determined the specific methods used in the curriculum: emphasis on Scripture, accountability and discussion, practical take-home value, and creating a hunger to learn more. The emphasis on Scripture was the primary factor—for parents to adjust their lives to the way God intends them to live, they need to hear directly from God in His Word. It was also important that this class not be merely informational but that it also built lasting relationships and accountability among the participating families. This is why discussion questions and round tables were used. I also wanted the parents to have something memorable and practical to walk away with, which is why I ended each class with a one-sentence summation of the main point as well as a homework assignment. Finally, I wanted parents to have a hunger and desire to grow more in the discipleship of their children, which is why I provided a list of additional resources and also gave several out for free throughout the duration of the class.

Once developed, the curriculum was submitted to the expert panel, and their feedback led to helpful modifications. The curriculum was finalized when each panel member gave their full approval. This approval was measured by means of a rubric that evaluated the curriculum based on the following areas:

1. The curriculum was biblically faithful, meaning that it was theologically and hermeneutically sound and properly interpreted, explained, and applied.
2. The curriculum had a sufficient scope, meaning it covered the basics of family discipleship and adequately taught its importance.
3. The curriculum employed the best methodology, meaning that it made use of various teaching opportunities.
4. The curriculum was highly practical and prepared parents to be well equipped to disciple their families by the end of the process.

The rubric featured a four-point scale where “1” meant “Does Not Meet Expectations,” “2” meant “Partially Meets Expectations,” “3” meant “Meets Expectations,” and “4” meant “Exceeds Expectations.” The curriculum was not considered fully developed until every area received *at least* 3, meaning that it met expectations.³ Tables 1 and 2 detail the scoring changes between drafts 1 and 2 of the curriculum for the two areas with the lowest initial scores: biblical content and practicality.

Table 1. Rubric scores for biblical content

	Draft 1	Draft 2
Tuttle	3	4
Edem	4	4
Osmanski	3	4
Beaver	4	4
Hawkins	2	4
Leopard	4	4

³ See appendix 2.

Table 2. Rubric scores for practicality

	Draft 1	Draft 2
Tuttle	4	4
Edem	4	4
Osmanski	2	4
Beaver	3	4
Hawkins	4	4
Leopard	2	4

Most of the feedback from the panel for the curriculum centered around specific language and clarity of discussion questions. This feedback was helpful and led me to further ensure that I was communicating clearly, for while this project and its teaching may be highly familiar to me, but it would not be to the parents. One member of the panel particularly had questions about the use of Joshua 24 in the third lesson about worship in the home. Upon further discussion with the panelist, he realized that he had not fully understood my usage, but I also realized that there was a better passage to use in that context. Based on this feedback and the changes made, the second goal was successfully met.

Goal 3

The third goal was to change the perceptions and practices of family discipleship among the families of Washington Heights by implementing the developed curriculum in a four-week parenting course. My initial plan for this project was to meet with a small handful of families for monthly, intensive shepherding (counseling) sessions to help them with their specific family discipleship issues. This plan was born out of a desire for one-on-one discipleship and a belief that the best growth comes from intentionally focused guidance, matters rooted in the heart of the project itself, and the awareness that humans do their best spiritual growth when someone listens to and intimately guides them.

However, upon further research and study of other effective projects, I realized this would not be the most efficient way to achieve my purpose. Instead, I decided to teach a four-week parenting class that was open to all families in Washington Heights.

While I would lose out on the intentional one-on-one counseling conversations, I was able to reach more families with a broader range of information. As a bonus, several families further pursued one-on-one meetings to discuss the specifics of their family situations. However, those opportunities may not have happened had I not broadened the scope of the curriculum. I decided on four classes partly because I considered it the maximum number for sustaining full attendance from families. Based on my research, I also knew I could efficiently and successfully cover the basics of family discipleship in four classes.

The classes met in the month of January (and one week in February) 2020, during the church's first service, which begins at 9 a.m. The time of year was chosen because it was after the holidays, which meant families were less likely to be absent, and it gave enough time to adequately communicate the course content. The last day of class was Super Bowl Sunday, which has historically been a well-attended Sunday at Washington Heights.

The reason class met during the first service was twofold. First, a previous parenting class was held during that time and was well attended. Second, most parents who attend Adult Bible Fellowship Classes do so during second service. This meant that parents could come to the Family Discipleship class and have the choice during second hour to either go to their regularly scheduled ABF or to the worship service. Most chose to go to the service.

Upon completion of the class, a post-survey was administered and collected. I received fourteen surveys that met the criteria of: (1) pairing with a completed pre-survey and (2) attending all four classes. Because the t-test was paired, I could only use surveys from families that completed both the pre- and post-surveys. I also chose to use only surveys from families that attended all four class sessions in order to get the most complete input across all areas covered by the class. One complication that prevented me from receiving more completed post-surveys was that the COVID-19 pandemic hit at the deadline to submit completed surveys. However, a few families still mailed or emailed

completed surveys to me, giving me enough surveys to complete the test and compile the results.

The third goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-survey results: $t_{(13)} = -5.608, p < .0001$. Questions 1-8 were about Family Discipleship Perceptions, while questions 9-16 were about Family Discipleship Practices. Both sections showed statistically significant growth. The result for the Perceptions section was $t(13) = -2.953, p < .006$, while the result for Practices was $t(13) = -5.922, p < .0001$. It was interesting to note that Practices started lower (30.8) but increased more (36.4); whereas, Perceptions started higher (38.8), but did not increase nearly as much (41.4), although the end result was that Perceptions still scored higher than practices. This indicates that parents who completed this course began with a stronger foundation in their knowledge of family discipleship, with a slight discrepancy in their consistency of putting that knowledge to practice. To put it simply, the parents knew the right answers but struggled to put that knowledge to work. However, it also means that parents had more room to grow in their practice of family discipleship, which was revealed by the greater increase in score.

The first eight questions sought to understand parents' perceptions and beliefs of family discipleship, primarily in the areas of family worship (questions 1-3), intentional spiritual engagement and discipleship roles (questions 4-6), and dynamics of the family/church relationship (questions 7-8). The last eight questions quantified the way families practice family discipleship by asking for the frequency of relevant activities, including spiritual conversations (questions 11, 12, 14, and 16), family worship and Bible reading (questions 11 and 13), and family rhythms (questions 10 and 12). Table 3 provides the statistical results for each of the six subsections.

Table 3. Statistical results for survey subsections

Survey Section	Pre-Class Mean	Post-Class Mean	Mean Change	t-stat	p-stat
Family Worship Perceptions	12.7	15.3	+2.6	-7.42	<.0001
Intentional Spiritual Engagement & Discipleship	16.8	16.5	-.3	.98	.171
Family/Church Dynamics	9.23	9.53	+.3	-.95	.179
Spiritual Conversation Practices	15.9	18.0	+2.1	-3.54	.002
Family Worship & Bible Reading Practices	8.8	11.6	+2.8	-4.11	<.0001
Family Rhythms	9.9	10.3	+.4	-1.33	.102

Although not every area of family discipleship showed statistically significant improvement, the overall curriculum showed statistically significant growth. This shows that the curriculum was successful in its goal of better equipping parents to disciple their children. However, every project has strengths, weaknesses, and ways it could improve. Those realities are explored next.

Strengths of the Project

This project was not perfect, but it did have many strengths. The first strength was the biblical support for its purpose. There is a potential in any research of this sort that the purpose may be well intentioned, but not as well supported in Scripture. This can happen when popular trends in thinking influence a passion or idea. Thankfully, that was not the case with this project. While there has been a shift in parts of western church culture to focus more on family ministry as a whole, this shift is grounded in the Word and intention of God.

Deuteronomy 6 was a central passage to Jewish life and its teaching on the importance of family was carried out throughout the culture. Psalm 78 is a great example of the call to pass God’s teaching on to the next generation, but it is only one of several psalms to do so.⁴ Also, not only is this project’s purpose supported in the passages explored

⁴ Pss 22 and 49 are other examples.

in chapter 2, but the significance of family is a theme throughout the rest of Scripture as well. It was encouraging to see Scripture continually supporting the necessity of Family Discipleship

The purpose of this project also proved practical in the days following its implementation. As the COVID-19 crisis swept the world, I was able to reach out to and encourage parents that it was important now more than ever for them to use what they had learned in class. As families were at home together, they were able to find more consistency in family worship and had many more opportunities to have a spiritual conversation or show their child grace—or ask for it. The COVID crisis simply showed in a focused way that this teaching is not just an empty theory or lofty idea, but that it is practical and necessary in the lives of believing families.

Another strength of this project was its implementation. The style and methodology worked well to allow parents the best chance to learn by both listening and engaging. The discussion questions sprinkled throughout the curriculum as opposed to piled on at the end allowed parents to wrestle with thoughts along the way and follow more closely. The discussion also gave parents the chance to support other families by listening to one another and giving input or encouragement. The conversations in class also spilled over into conversations outside of class. Several families took time to talk together in the hallways of church or on the phone throughout the week, and they felt comfortable doing that because the conversation began in the safety of the classroom.

The additional resources and use of PowerPoint were other practical ways for parents to learn the material by receiving it in different forms. Handing out some resources put them directly into the parent's hands and helped to remove any excuses to not continue learning outside of class. This take-home value of the class was also promoted by the homework assignments and subsequent discussions the following week.

Finally, the setting of the class itself proved to be a strength. From the actual set up of the room, to the timing on Sunday morning, to the fact that there had been a

parenting class the previous year, things seemed to move into place to set this project up for success. My role as pastor to both children and students also added credibility and relatability to my teaching. Parents are more willing to listen to someone who loves and ministers to their children, and because I know and pastor all their children, parents were more willing to listen to what I had to say about how they disciplined their families.

Weaknesses of the Project

Inevitably, this project had weaknesses as well. One weakness was my own presumption that the parents were less knowledgeable about family discipleship than the survey revealed them to be. The parents tested very high on their first survey, which made it more difficult to find room for improvement. Obviously, parents coming to the class with a healthy, biblical understanding of the material is a great blessing. However, my expectations for their understanding going into this project were perhaps too low.

Another weakness of this project was a lack of pulpit support. While the class itself was effective and successful, family discipleship is not yet part of the church culture because it is not made a priority from the top down. Obviously, creating a culture of family discipleship is one of the post-project goals, but this could be difficult if it is not something made important by the greater church body and its leadership. Thankfully, the parents themselves are able to make a great difference in how the children's ministry runs and can have an influence in creating a family discipleship culture.

Some aspects of the survey were a weakness of this project. The survey as a whole was not the problem, as it has been used many times and in many ways to better understand the perceptions and practices of family discipleship. However, it would have been made better if I had modified or removed some of the questions, or directed them more toward specific elements of family discipleship. Granted, the purpose of the survey was to assess the *overall* perceptions and practices of family discipleship, not to narrow in on a few areas, but upon completion of the class and reception of the completed post-surveys, I realized that the survey could have been better tailored to the curriculum. This

is, of course, an area in which hindsight is better than foresight. However, if I were to implement this project again, I would change some elements of the survey to better focus on the specific areas I plan to cover.

Another weakness of the project was the distribution and collection of surveys. Using paper surveys is a great way to get something into someone's hands, but snail mail does not always communicate urgency. Many families confessed to opening the survey and putting it aside to complete later when they had time to focus, but then forgetting about it until the last moment. Obviously, it is great for families to want to take their time on the surveys, but frequent reminders or various forms of the survey may have helped increase the number of responses.

Lastly, this curriculum by itself was not sufficient to create a culture of family discipleship. While the training was successful for parents, it cannot stand on its own. The church must find a way to continue promoting family discipleship and supporting parents in their efforts to be the primary disciplers of their children. This might mean a change in programming or a change in communication. Either way, a class cannot change a culture by itself, it must have the support of other aspects within the organization of the church body.

What I Would Do Differently

Based on its strengths and weaknesses, I plan to implement several changes next time I execute this project. The first change would be to use online surveys. There might be wisdom in using online surveys in addition to the paper surveys, instead of as a replacement, as that would offer various forms and opportunities for families to complete it. Regardless, online surveys will need to be used to receive a higher percentage of completed surveys.

As mentioned, I also plan to rewrite portions of the survey. While the survey will still be based strongly on Jones' work, certain areas need to be better tailored for this project's curriculum. For instance, grouping the related questions into sections will provide

better clarity in the questions' purpose. Additionally, I intend to focus on having only questions that directly relate to the curriculum itself, which means removing certain questions that pertain to material not sufficiently addressed during the class. Changing the survey will allow people the chance to see the most growth throughout the class. Having questions on the survey that do not directly correlate to the curriculum is unnecessary.

Another change, also related to modifying the survey, is a focus on the area of evangelism. One of the questions on the survey that was inadequately addressed in class was question 15: "How many times in the past year have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?" This question received low scores on both pre- and post-surveys, but it was not covered well in the class. This issue could be resolved by either removing the question or giving families specific opportunities and training for this type of evangelism during the class.

In addition to the changes made to the content and implementation of the survey, I also need to increase the number of participating families in the class. Several families completed pre-surveys but never attended class. For some of these families, the reason for their absence was that they are inconsistent attenders, and there is little I can do to change this except to speak to them directly and encourage them to come to class. Some families, however, were unable to attend because they had an ABF during the class time, or they were serving somewhere.

To better include these absent families, it would be beneficial to record the class sessions and make the recordings available to the absentees. While they would miss out on important discussions, they would still receive the teaching and be strongly encouraged to reach out with any questions or thoughts. Another way to engage absent families would be to find a creative way to challenge the children to encourage their parents to come.

It would also be helpful to actively include the children in this class in some way. This could be done by including the children in part of the class, which would allow families to practice certain elements, such as family worship or spiritual conversations. I could also find a way for the children to create some form of encouragement for their parents. Children's needs are one of the great motivators in a parent's life, and having their children encourage them in class might increase the motivation of the parents to better implement these teachings at home.

Finally, I would create a better plan to conserve the fruit of the class going forward. The absence from church due to COVID-19 was both a great opportunity for families to practice family discipleship and a roadblock to creating a culture of family discipleship within the church. Regardless, having a plan that can be immediately implemented following the class would be an important step in keeping this teaching fresh on parents' minds.

Some ideas for creating this culture of family discipleship include creating a family discipleship library, creating weekly family worship guides, and establishing accountability among the families. These are all still useful ideas, and ideas that I hope to implement, but having a plan that would put these into action immediately following the class might have increased the lasting effectiveness of the class.

Theological Reflections

This project began with a conviction that every believing family ought to intentionally disciple their children in the ways of God. After years of watching peers walk away from the church and seeing many Christians slide into nominal faith, I was passionate about parents taking their God-given role seriously. While the research for this project certainly supports this passion, the teaching found in Deuteronomy 6 shows that it is not just family discipleship that must be addressed and refocused. This teaching that worship of YHWH ought to be the central theme of every human life has impacted the way I view the entirety of the Christian life.

Deuteronomy 6 has proven to be an incredibly formative passage in my life and discipleship, even beyond verses 4-9. While those verses specifically drew me to this passage, I found that the entire context of Deuteronomy 6 was relevant for a life lived for YHWH. Because YHWH is God and God alone, every fiber of our being ought to be dedicated to Him—heart, soul, and might. This is, of course, why Moses teaches in verses 7-9 that discussion of God’s truth ought to penetrate every moment and area of our lives. However, the rest of Deuteronomy 6 also contains relevant teaching for our lived discipleship, which I did not fully appreciate until I was preparing to teach the Family Discipleship Class.

God’s people must be aware of being overly comfortable in the blessings God has given to them, lest they turn and worship the false gods of culture. They must turn to God in gratitude for all that they have and turn away from the false gods of wealth, power, and pleasure that try to take His place. God’s people must also learn His stories by making them their own and sharing them with others. They must learn to find their own testimony and story in the midst of God’s big story for His people. When this is accomplished, God’s people discover that their life and discipleship is simply a small part of all God is doing in His creation. This humbling reminder helps God’s children to properly see their place in this world and find the work He has for them. If someone can humbly submit themselves to what God is doing through them, then discipleship of oneself and one’s children becomes a part of every moment of life.

I have also learned to better appreciate the need to be surrounded by God’s people and in fellowship with the church. Every passage studied for this project—and every passage in Scripture, for that matter—is not meant for a specific individual but is meant for the community of God’s people. Every teaching on family discipleship is given to a community that can hold one another accountable, pray for one another, and love one another. Too often, parenting is seen as confined to a family, which is a lie constructed

from this modern individualistic society. Without healthy community, families will not be as strong as they could be, and individuals will not stand.

This project helped me understand that every individual is part of a community called a family, and the members of that family contribute to each other's spiritual growth. However, each individual family is—or should be—part of a larger church community, which is responsible for the family's spiritual health. And, of course, each church community is only a small part of the cosmic, catholic church community that goes beyond time and space, and that community finds itself in God. God created His world with the intention that every individual would find themselves wrapped up into smaller communities, which are wrapped up into larger communities. Because of this reality, every individual's discipleship should be the responsibility and concern of the larger body of faith. What happens to one is felt by all, and this is felt even stronger in the tightness of the family unit.

Family discipleship is truly God's desire for the family. In the midst of an individualistic, over-busy culture, God has ordained families to live out His Way and worship Him together in the ordinary events of everyday life.

Personal Reflections

When I reflect on this project, I feel a deep sense of humility and gratitude. I am humbled to be used in such an incredible process and for such a meaningful purpose. I would have never considered myself capable of completing a project or pursuing a degree of this magnitude, and for God to call me up and out of my own inability and self-doubt to be used for His purpose is incredibly humbling. I am thankful for His grace and how He has used me effectively to train the parents of Washington Heights.

This process has also been humbling for me as a parent. When I began this project, my daughter was just over two years old. While this is certainly a critical age, life is still more about physical survival than theological upbringing—or so I thought. Now, my daughter is going on five and my son is almost one, and what I knew intellectually

has now become a reality in practicality. Family discipleship is no longer just a matter of academic interest or ministry effectiveness, it is a matter of personal significance. What I have taught to the parents through this class I have had to humbly learn the hard way.

There was a level of arrogance to my initial work on this project. When I first began writing my ministry project proposal, I thought that the parents at Washington Heights were what I assumed all Christian parents must be—lazy, ineffectual, and slowly ruining their children’s spiritual lives. I am humbled and overjoyed to have learned that the parents of Washington Heights are simply doing the best with what they know—which is significantly more than I gave them credit for—and truly desire their children to know God. I wish I had been more gracious toward these wonderful parents in my early ministry and at the beginning of this project, but had that been the case, I may not have had the drive to pursue this project. I am learning that the Christian life is a continual process of humbly learning what you do not know as well as you once thought you did.

To this day, I am continually learning for myself things that I have taught through this class. This is a great reminder that I am not an expert in family discipleship—not by a long shot. No matter how much knowledge I have, nothing will keep me from having to do the difficult day in and day out work of intentionally pointing my children to Christ. It is one of my great joys when my wife reminds me of something she learned from the class that we need to do and that I have neglected. Even if I still need to be a student, it is good to know she was able to learn from me.

This realization, and this program as a whole, has shown me just how much I must daily strive in my discipleship to Christ. What I know is not enough if I am not continually seeking Christ. My head knowledge will not be enough for my own soul and it will not be enough for my children to desire the Lord. I must live the way of Jesus, first for my own sake and then for my children’s. I have often prayed for the Lord to make me a father like He is, and as my children grow, I have felt that need more and more. This project has acted as a magnifying glass for my discipleship, zooming in and showing me

that I have no right to teach these truths of God—either to the parents of Washington Heights or to my children—if it is not daily changing my life.

I am grateful for the opportunity to minister to families. My ministry and this project have been incredible reminders of just how far I have left to go in my life with Christ. Had it been an easy project, I would have missed out on all of the great lessons of humility that God had planned for me to learn. The best thing I have learned from this process is the same thing I taught the parents: let every day of your life be devoted to God and strive to keep Him at the center of it. If I stay humble and live gratefully, I will continue to grow in Him and be used to see my children do the same.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the t-test for dependent samples, this project was a success. More importantly, this project had a successful impact on a number of individual souls and families—including my own. As I grow in ministry, as a father, as a husband, and as a disciple of Christ, I pray that I will never forget all that this project taught me. I pray that the content of these chapters can be a help and encouragement to others attempting to train others to disciple their families. More so, I pray that every life that has been impacted by this study—including my own—will never stop loving the Lord with all their heart, soul, and might. May God’s kingdom come and His will be done on earth as in heaven and in every soul that seeks His face.

APPENDIX 1

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES SURVEY

The following instrument gathered accurate information and assessed the discipling practices of the families at WHBC. The survey begins by gathering general biographical information while remaining anonymous. Next, the survey consists of sixteen questions to be answered by parents or guardians. The first eight questions determine the parental perceptions and beliefs regarding family discipleship. These questions were answered on a six-point scale of agreement. The following eight questions determined the current practices of families in the area of discipleship. These questions were answered on a six-point scale of frequency. The basis of this survey was used with permission from Timothy Paul Jones and comes out of his book, *Family Ministry Field Guide*.¹

¹ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing, 2011).

Family Discipleship Perceptions and Practices Survey

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is to assess your family's current practices and perceptions of family discipleship. This research is being conducted by Josh Tuttle for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research you will be asked to answer sixteen questions regarding Family Discipleship. The first eight questions are to determine your perceptions and beliefs regarding family discipleship based on a six-point scale of agreement. The following eight questions are to determine your family's current practices in the area of family discipleship on a six-point scale of frequency. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

At Washington Heights, our desire is for your children to love the Lord with all of their heart and soul. We want to see your family grow and walk in the ways of Christ, thus setting yourselves apart as the people of God. Because of the relational heart of ministry and this project's purpose to better equip your family in the ways of God, we prefer that you include your name below, rather than completing the survey anonymously. However, if you prefer to remain anonymous, please use the last four digits of either your Social Security or phone number. This will help us to keep track of information for your family throughout the project.

Parent/Guardian 1

Name: _____ Age: _____

Parent/Guardian 2

Name: _____ Age: _____

- or -

Last Four Digits of SSN or Phone Number: _____

List your children (age, gender, and [unless anonymous] name)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How long have you been married? _____

Do either of you come from previous marriages? _____

Husband: How long have you been a follower of Christ? _____

How long have you regularly attended church? _____

Are you currently serving in the church in any capacity? _____

If so, where? _____

Wife: How long have you been a follower of Christ? _____

How long have you regularly attended church? _____

Are you currently serving in the church in any capacity? _____

If so, where? _____

Would you describe your life as busy? _____

Explain: _____

What do you look to get out of your involvement in the church?

What do you look for your children to get out of their involvement in the church?

DIRECTIONS: The following questions are to determine your perceptions of family discipleship. On your own, please answer them honestly using the scale below.

Part 1: Parental Perceptions						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I prioritize consistent family worship times in my family's schedule.						
2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while.						
3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching.						
4. When my children spontaneously ask a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me.						
5. I want to do whatever it takes for my children to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat meals together.						
6. Parents, and particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.						
7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others.						
8. My church has helped me develop a clear plan for my children's spiritual growth.						

DIRECTIONS: The following questions are to determine your practices of family discipleship. On your own, please answer them honestly using the scale below.

Part 2: Parental Practices						
	Never	Once	A couple of times	Three or Four times	Five or Six times	Seven or more times
9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past <i>week</i> have I prayed aloud with any of my children?						
10. How many times in the past <i>week</i> has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?						
11. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?						
12. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?						
13. How many times in the past <i>month</i> has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?						
14. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?						
15. How many times in the past <i>year</i> have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?						
16. How often in the past <i>year</i> have I discussed my children's spiritual development with a church leader?						

APPENDIX 2

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation rubric was sent to an expert panel of one children's pastor, one family pastor, and one lead pastor of a local church. This panel evaluated the course material to ensure it is biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

Name of Evaluator: _____

Date: _____

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC					
1 = Doesn't meet expectations; 2 = Partially meets; 3 = Meets expectations; 4 = Exceeds expectations					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The content of the curriculum is hermeneutically sound. All Scripture is properly interpreted, explained, and applied.					
The content of the curriculum is theologically sound.					
Scope					
The curriculum sufficiently covers the basics of family discipleship.					
Methodology					
The curriculum makes us of various teaching opportunities such as mentoring, counseling, reading (both Scripture and contemporary sources), and practical discipleship.					
The curriculum provides parents a chance to learn sound teaching and adopt best practices for discipleship.					
Practicality					
The curriculum prepares parents to be well equipped to disciple their families at the end of the process.					

Please include any additional comments regarding the curriculum below:

APPENDIX 3

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

The following curriculum was developed based on the research conducted in this project. It was refined after receiving the completed pre-surveys and further developed upon receiving the graded rubrics from the expert panel. It was taught over a period of four hour-and-a-half long classes on Sunday mornings at 9 a.m. from January 12, 2020 to February 2, 2020. What follows is an outline of all four sessions.

SESSION 1 | GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR FAMILIES

I. OPENING Q - As people settle in
“Who were the most significant people in your spiritual development?”

Matt Comer does announcements & prayer

II. INTRODUCE CLASS

Welcome to our first Family Discipleship Class.

I want to start our time with a bit of explanation of what this class will look like. For the **next 4 weeks** we will be meeting together in this room at this time to discuss Family Discipleship. What exactly is Family Discipleship? Well, I'm glad you asked. That's, in part, what we will be spending 4 weeks trying to figure out. As a way of brief definition before we go further in depth, Family Discipleship as I mean it is: **the way in which you teach your family to follow Christ.** *Here is a brief look at what we'll be discussing for the next 4 weeks.*

Our plan for the coming weeks will be to dig into Scripture together and I will be giving other resources for you to check out. But second to hearing straight from God's word, what I think will be most helpful will be **group discussion**. If the idea of group discussion gives you anxiety, don't worry, we have plenty of people that don't care about putting their foot in their mouth by talking first. Just wait for them to go and then you can speak up.

We'll be dancing in and out of my teaching from God's Word, discussing as a large group, and discussing at our tables. I've also got us in round tables because part of the purpose behind this class is for us to learn to rely on each other for support and that we will all benefit from everyone's shared insights. We're all in this together and we as the church desperately need each other's encouragement and accountability. So, make sure you get to know one another better.

Now there are **three different Josh's** that are interested in teaching you this curriculum. First, there is *Josh the doctoral student*. This course is, indeed, my ministry project for the completion of my Doctor of Educational Ministry Degree at Southern Seminary in Louisville. Provided you all play nice, I will graduate in December. This class is the practical result of my past two years of research and writing. The reason you took the surveys before the class is so that at the end of the class we can see if you've learned anything. So, the first Josh is academically curious about how to better prepare you as parents to disciple your families.

The second *Josh is a pastor*. This is the Josh who has an awesome job where he gets to hang out with your kids and teach them the Bible. This Josh has come to learn that I can teach any number of wonderful things, do any number of fun events, and run a great youth group, but the person with the most influence on whether your children will grow

up to love Jesus is *you*. So, the second Josh is doing this for your families, because my passion in life is that your kids would know and love the Lord. Because He loves them.

The third *Josh is a parent*. This is the Josh that totally gets how hard this is. This is the Josh that is constantly questioning if he's doing it right (although the other Josh's ask that question a lot too). This is the Josh who is just like you, trying to figure this all out. This Josh owes a lot to the other two Josh's who have helped him better understand what God has to say to us all as parents. This is the Josh that is sitting in those seats with you. Know that while I am teaching and pastoring, I am also trying to figure it all out right along with you. I empathize with the failures, the frustrations, and the downright exhaustion.

Now that you are terrified that I have multiple personality disorder and are wondering if Josh will keep talking in the third person all morning, *let's pray and begin*.

III. TEACHING

This morning we will be introducing the idea of Family Discipleship and why it is worth talking about by learning from Scripture what *God's Plan is for Your Family*. Before we dig into the Word, I want to hear how you answered our little table question: "Who were the most significant people in your spiritual development?"

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

We're going to begin by opening toad reading from *Deuteronomy 6:4-9*. What stands out to you in this passage?

Before we dig in to the passage, a little word about why this passage is important. This is not just some random passage that I pulled out and twisted to support my ideas. It's also not some tiny throwaway verse that isn't really that important. Although most of us don't hang out in Deuteronomy very often, this book was absolutely central to life for Israel. This book represents Moses' final teaching before his death and Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. This is like the last minute reminder for the way God wants Israel to live.

And this passage that we've read is a passage known as the *Shema*, which is Hebrew for "Hear". This passage was absolutely central to Israelite life. At least twice everyday this passage was repeated during the morning and evening prayers. It would have been known by every Hebrew child from a very young age. Out of all the passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, this is the one around which all of Jewish life was centered. So, let's dig in.

Verse 4

Verse 4 is the actual Shema that would have been repeated. It reads in the ESV, "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one." For such an important passage, it has actually been historically difficult to translate. So, naturally, I'm going to give it a whirl.

For me, it helps to break this verse down into 3 parts. Starting out of order, we must understand what is meant by the word 'God'. God is the Hebrew word *elohim*, and *elohim* is a way to describe something other. We get this same sense in the english translations of the word: god, angels, spiritual beings. Something that's not from around here. But in this verse, we're not just talking about a spiritual being. The Shema tells us that the LORD is the *elohim* of *elohim*. He is not just a god, He is The God—the most

supreme being in all the universe, the chief and highest, the holiest of holy. If everything operates on a hierarchy, God is the very topmost. There is nothing more than God. Have I made the point yet? It's important to understand this because we need to realize that God is not the name in this sentence—it's the title. The name is what we will turn to next.

Because whenever you see The LORD in all caps like that in your Bible, you know it is a placeholder for the name of the God of the Bible. In the Hebrew Scripture the name was changed to Adonai. We've come to refer to Him as Jehovah. The Hebrew letters are the four letters: *Yod, He, Vaw, He*. Commonly known as Yahweh. So, in this sentence, what we are reading is that YHWH is God. Israel, listen up, YHWH is God, He is the most important being in the universe. This statement was a twice daily reminder of Who was in charge of the world. YHWH.

We see the difference between these two distinctions, these two references to God in the first two chapters of Scripture. In Genesis 1, we read that God, *elohim*, created the heavens and the earth. Day after day, the one creating is referred to simply as *elohim*. We are being told that everything we see finds its origins in someone that's not from around here. It's not until Genesis 2 that this God introduces Himself. We read in verse 2:4, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created in the day that YHWH God made them." Does that distinction make sense? Okay, back to Deuteronomy 6:4.

The third element of this important passage is that it says, YHWH God is the only God. This is a statement against polytheism and idolatry. The meaning of this final part of the verse is that YHWH is the highest and ultimate being and end of the universe, and He is that alone. There are no other gods and YHWH does not share power.

So why get in to all that? I thought this class was about Family Discipleship? It is in this context of the centrality of YHWH as God that we learn what it means to disciple our families.

Verse 5

Verse 5 gives us the immediate response to the teaching in verse 4. If YHWH is the most supreme Being in the universe and He is the only most important thing, then you are to devote your entire life to Him. Love Him with all of you. These three phrases together sufficiently include every aspect of who you are. All of it, the whole kit and kaboodle are to be devoted to God.

But this isn't as easy as it sounds. We all have things that we naturally and instinctively choose above everything else. When our back is against the wall, or when we just have a choice to make, we all have various things we bend towards. For some of us, it's following the rules, whatever rule it is. When we come to a decision, we stick with the order and authority of our station. We don't rock the boat, we just do what we're supposed to. For some of us it's relationships and acceptance, we'll do whatever it takes to be accepted by those around us. For some of us, it's our family, we'll do anything and everything for our families before anyone else. For some of us it's success and security, we see success as a means to having enough and we believe that if we have enough than

we'll be enough and we won't have to worry about anything. Whatever it is, we have things that are really calling the shots in our lives and our actions reveal what those are.

Discussion Question (whole group) - So let me give a silly example and you all can respond. If the most important thing in your life was the Ohio State Buckeyes (I know, I'm hitting a little close to home) what would practically show that in your life? How would you show by your actions that OSU was more important than anything else.

Table Talk (at tables) - *In the same way, what would it mean for God to be central to your life?*

Verses 7-9

Moses gives us some help with this question in the rest of our passage. Now that he has established that YHWH is central to life and that we are to be wholly devoted to Him, how do we do that?

Depending on how you count, Moses gives us four primary ways to center our lives around God:

First, we are to teach them to our children. We teach our kids what is important to our family like taking your shoes off in the house, staying clean, being polite, so shouldn't it make sense that we should actively teach them that God is central to life as well? The word translated as "teach" in the ESV and "impress" in the NIV is a word that has to do with piercing something. I don't know that this was in the original meaning, but I think of a tattoo. A tattoo is basically just getting stabbed a hundred times in a colorful pattern. But after having the ink go in, what's left is a permanent impression of what you want to remember. In the same (but very different) way, we are to impress on and teach our children the love of God as primary in our lives. If someone were to ask your children what is most important to their parents, would they say God?

Second, we are to talk about it. Talk about it when you're sitting around the house, when you're out and about, when your laying down, and when you're waking up. It feels a little bit like Green Eggs & Ham. But the point Moses is making is that the reality and teachings of God ought to be part of your everyday life discussions. You don't teach your kids by creating a seminary in your home, you do it by revealing God to them in everyday life. God in the living room, God at Kroger, God at mealtimes, God in traffic. God is the first thought and word in the morning, and the last before bed. The rhythm and theme of your lives ought to be God. Does that seem like a little much? Then we need to go back and rehash verse 4. If God is the supreme being of the universe, the one who holds it all together, then He is the only thing worth discussing.

Third, Moses gives some weird fashion advice. But to understand what he's saying, look at the two places on your body he refers to: hands and eyes. What do you do with your hands? Everything! What do you see with your eyes? The things in front of them! Moses is saying that everything you do and everything you see should be colored in the reminder of Who God Is.

Lastly, Moses tells the people of Israel to write it on their doors and gates. Again, this isn't meant to be something specific on a checklist, although go for it. What Moses is

saying is that whether you are leaving your house or coming home, you need to be reminded Who is the King of your life. Is your home ruled by God? Are the choices you make when you're out in the world ruled by God? By giving all these instructions, Moses is not letting us have any part of our lives that is not coated in a reminder of Who God is.

And honestly, I would see all of these as falling under the first. The things you talk about, do, look at, the decor around your home, these are the things that shape your children, the things they'll remember. Make sure you're teaching them about God and how to love Him.

TT - At your tables, discuss what the modern equivalent of these different things (from v. 7-9) would be.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Let's turn to one more passage together. *Ephesians 6:1-4.*

This passage is Paul's crescendo of his letter to the Ephesians. Paul has been writing about the eminence of Christ, the mystery of what He's done and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And just as we think Paul is going to keep getting grander and grander, he turns to the most commonplace of all relationships: husband and wife, parent and child, boss and employee. Paul saw our everyday lives and relationships as the place to work out our reality in Christ.

Now on the surface, this is a very straightforward passage, kids obey your folks and folks don't make your kids mad. But who likes straightforward?

First, Paul addresses the kids. This is significant and we'll talk about it more in a couple weeks, but by addressing the kids directly, Paul is showing us that the children would have been part of corporate worship with their parents, rather than shuffled off to the first century equivalent of Sunday School. But like I said, we'll get there in a couple weeks.

Paul addresses the kids and simply says, obey your parents because it is right. The word for *right* is the Greek word for *righteous*, meaning the way God intended or ordered it. To be righteous is to be in right relationship with God. So, for children to obey their parents is the natural order of things. Martin Lloyd-Jones writes, "In the relationship of children to parents we have a picture of the relationship of all mankind originally to God." Children are meant to follow the lead of their parents, and more often than not they do.

DQ - Quick question, what is something your kids do that they just picked up from you? A habit or a quirk?

Second, Paul addresses the parents. He says, "Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger." It's important to understand that just because Paul doesn't mention mothers means that mom's have no responsibility. Rather Paul, who is always concerned with proper order, is expressing that final responsibility for the rearing of children falls on the male head of the household. But this isn't a dictatorship, it is a partnership. We should read this command as a shared responsibility, rather than as an excuse to assign blame.

What Paul is saying to parents is to not oppress your kids or deject them. That is not how God wants us to raise our children. We are to lift them up, not beat them down. He gives two words for how we do this. We are to raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the LORD. This includes correction and everyday teaching. Every moment is an opportunity to raise our kids in the LORD, whether we are correcting their actions or preemptively teaching them how to live.

That is the straightforward teaching of Paul, but something else I want us to understand from this passage is that Paul is saying it is parents who are to lead the home rather than kids. Now, I would be shocked if any of us would disagree with that, but how much of what we do puts our kids in the driver's seat instead of us. How many of our activities are based around our children's preferences rather than what they should be doing? How many of our decisions are done because we think it's what the kids would want rather than what is necessarily best for them?

I know we all want our kids to get ahead, but what does that really mean? Does that mean giving them free reign to do everything and call the shots? Or does that mean intentionally guiding them in the best ways of life, specifically the ways of God.

It all comes back to our family habits and rhythms. What does what you do say about who you are and *Who's* you are?

III. CONCLUSION

If we believe the words of Deuteronomy 6:4 that YHWH is the only supreme Being, the most important thing in the universe, then our lives ought to be focused and centered around His teaching, which means that the words of Scripture ought to shape the way we live our lives. Scripture makes it clear that God's intention is for the parents to be the primary means of spiritual growth, or discipleship, in a child's life. Obviously, there are exceptions, broken homes, loss, and exceptional situations. We of course adapt and adjust when that occurs, but the outliers do not change the expected norm, and **that is that God created us, you, me, to be the primary shepherds of our children's souls.** Be encouraged by this: **God created you specifically to lead your children to Him. He gave you the sufficient wisdom and tools to get the job done.** And the beauty is, your primary job is to point. Is in the everyday situations of life to point your children to God's glory. To show them in little ways all the time that YHWH is God alone.

We've talked about some of these rhythms, and we will continue in the coming weeks to talk about these ways. I pray that something said today will find itself lived out practically in your lives.

IV. HOMEWORK

But here's your homework: Before you can disciple your kids, you need to pray for them. You need to realize your inability to affect change in their lives without the Holy Spirit. So everyday this week, you and your spouse carve out 15 minutes to pray together for your children.

Yes, observe your habits and schedules and rhythms, but start with prayer before you start making changes. Invite God into your homes. Do that together.

Speaking of which, let's pray. *Pray Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

SESSION 1 | OVERVIEW

Goal: For parents to see the discipleship of their families as God's mandate to them and primarily their responsibility, as opposed to the primary the responsibility of professional ministers.

Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Ephesians 6:1-4

Exegesis:

A) Moses calls God's people to center their lives around the belief that God is supreme. He then gives practical advice and encouragement about how to do that as they live their everyday lives.

B) Paul teaches on the relationships between Christian family members. It is the responsibility of the parents to discipline and raise their children in the ways of God. The parents are to lead the household, not the children.

Discussion Points: Who was the most significant person in your spiritual development? Based on your family's habits, what is most important to your family (not: what do you think should be most important)? What practical ways can you establish rhythms and habits that center your family life around God?

Practical Takeaway: The most significant thing I can teach my children is the love of God. The primary responsibility of that burden lies on me as their parent.

Homework: Carve out 15 minutes every day and pray as a couple for your children's spiritual growth.

Suggested Resources: *Shepherding A Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald Whitney, *Family Driven Faith* by Voddie Baucham

SESSION 2 | SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS

I. OPENING

After 10-15 minutes, open with announcements and prayer

II. RECAP

Homework check (give away books)

Brief recap of last week's discussion - centrality of YHWH in all you do, leading to intentional and practical discipleship of families.

III. TEACHING

Get two volunteers to play Word Sneak - "I need two volunteers that are really good at talking."

- Give books to volunteers

Intro

Conversations. We have them all the time, and yet we can still be really bad at them. Some of us feel like naturals at conversation, but sometimes that just means we don't know how to shut up. Some of us feel high anxiety at the prospect of conversations because we don't know what to say. We live in a culture that has lost the art of conversation and replaced it with a simple connection. We feel like we've got up with somebody if we sent them a text or a 'happy birthday' on Facebook. Genuine and beneficial conversations can be hard, but they are necessary to our flourishing as humans.

This morning we're going to look at two passages that help us unpack the importance of conversations with our children about spiritual matters.

Family Rhythms

Before we get into these passages, I want to stop and take a moment to explain a phrase I used last week and will keep using. "Family Rhythms". This is one of those phrases that I certainly didn't make up, but I think I came up with in my own head and that makes perfect sense to me, but isn't a common concept.

What I mean by family rhythms are the ways your family interacts with each other and the world around you. If it sounds vague, it's because it's a very broad concept. This is things as simple as your daily schedule, or as complicated as how you deal with grief and loss as a family. A Family Rhythm is difficult to define or understand because it's something we don't necessarily do on purpose, yet we all have life rhythms. The ebb and flow of family life, when Dad gets home from work, who cooks dinner, and who cleans up dishes, what evenings look like, do you have sacred times and spaces, what about Sundays? Do you have rules about television and homework, what do mealtimes look like? Do you have rhythms about interacting with each in conversation or getting ready for bed? It's as imperceptible as water is to a fish. It's just what you swim in.

Now, we all have rhythms, typically based on convenience or habit, but we can also be intentional about rhythms. We can do things on purpose in order to achieve a certain

goal. Maybe you work out every morning to stay in shape. Maybe you leave all electronics off during dinner so your family can have intentional time together. Maybe you don't let your kids use headphones on long trips, maybe you force your kids to use headphones on long trips. It's actually now of the primary goals of this class that we would stop and look at our family rhythms and consider which ones we need to adapt to better point our kids to God. I think the reason so many American Christian families are left baffled about why their kids stopped following the Lord is because we never actually knew what message we were saying. Because the message that's sent every day in every little thing is way louder than the lecture. And that's scary.

One of those rhythms is conversation. This morning we're going to look at two passages that teach us how to take those ordinary conversations and redeem them for discipleship.

Psalm 78 - God Stories

I want us to start in *Psalm 78:1-8*. Go ahead and open there.

This psalm is what is called a historical psalm. What it actually is is a story. It's a long story that talks about the unfaithfulness of the Ephraimites in contrast to the faithfulness of God. In this psalm, Asaph tells of all the things God did for Israel in the exodus and the wandering, how time and again He saved them, and how time and again they took Him for granted.

V.3

But before he writes the story, the psalmist gives something of a preamble. This is verses 1-8. Notice in these verses who is doing the communicating of the story. Fathers! Parents! This is a passage, like the two we looked at last week, that shows us that God's plan for passing on the knowledge of His glory is for parents. Obviously, there are exceptions, broken situations, but even biologically every child has two parents. The way God has designed every human that has ever lived is with two built-in mentors. God didn't make each child with a youth pastor or a teacher, but He did give them two parents. So while it takes a village, it starts at home.

One of the things I found striking as I looked through our surveys was that the mass majority of us in this room have grown up going to church, and many of us have been on the path of following Christ from about as early as we can remember. That is because your parents set an example and made it part of your family rhythms to go to church and be surrounded by other Christians. Just like you probably do a lot of things the same way as your parents (maybe some things unfortunately), this is a habit that most of us have simply carried on from our families. Now, those of you who did not grow up in church or as a Christian, you're here today and you have kids! You get to start the trend!

V.4

Not only does this preamble reveal who God has hand-picked to pass these truths on to your children (you!), but it also shows what the purpose of telling God-stories is. Look to verse 4. "The glorious deeds of the Lord, His might, and the wonders that He has done." Kids love superheroes. Let's be honest, we love superheroes, too; we've just stopped believing in them. But your kids haven't!

You're not just telling them the rules or moral behaviors, you are baptizing their imaginations, showing them the power and glory of God, revealing Him to be better than Iron Man, better than Thor. Tell your children the stories of YHWH so that they learn to lean on Him as their real superhero.

V.7

Down in verse 7 we see why we tell these stories, basically what benefit your kids get from hearing them. That they should set their hope in God, remember His works, and follow after Him. As much as you will try to prevent it, your kids will fall on hard times. In fact, they need to fall on hard times, they need to be challenged, to be brought to the end of themselves, because that's when they look beyond themselves. And if you have told them of God, of His might and wonders, then in those dark days they will set their hope on Him and not forget Him but will pursue Him.

Deuteronomy 6:20-25 - Spiritual Conversations

Let's go to one other passage, turn to *Deuteronomy 6:20-25*.

This passage takes place right after the main passage from last week in verses 4-9, so we're reading in the same vein of the centrality of YHWH and the total, everyday life commitment. But in verse 20 Moses poses a situation. He says, "Imagine your kid comes up to you some day and says, 'Dad, Mom, why do we do all this God stuff? What's the point?'" Many of you have maybe had similar situations: Why do we have to go to church? Why do we have to pray before we eat? Why are we helping them? Why do I have to read my Bible? Kids are curious! Unfortunately, as they grow into teenagers that curiosity twists into angst, but the heart of your teenagers' attitude is the same: they don't know why they have to do what you're asking them to do.

So, Moses says, tell them! And notice this: he says to tell them the story of what God has done. But this time it's personal. Tell them the story that God has done in your life. This is testimony, honesty. It's being real with your kids because they want to see the real you. It's about knowing why *you* do what you do. Why are you a believer? Why is YHWH central in your life? These are things that you didn't come out of the womb knowing, they had to be shown and taught to you. Give your kids that same benefit.

TT - Think back to a meaningful spiritual conversation you have had in your life. What made it meaningful?

IV. HOW TO CONVERSATE

Opportunities

So how do we do this? What does this look like in the lives of our kids and our families? Where in our family rhythms do these opportunities occur?

To sum up the two passages we looked at:

There are two types of conversations we have with our kids: proactive and reactive.

Proactive: hey can you clean up the dishes after dinner? Reactive: Why didn't you clean

up the dishes after dinner? Proactive: what did you do today? Reactive: Why did I get this call from your school?

Proactive: What has God been teaching you lately? or Let me tell you what God has been teaching me lately.

Reactive: This can be disciplinary in nature, it can be a reaction to loss or difficulty, it can be an answer to a question. The point is that both are significant and both can and should be used to point your child to God.

Psalm 78 shows us an example of a proactive situation: telling your children the stories of God. This is as simple as telling Bible stories to your kids. But doing so with the purpose of revealing God's nature to them. Don't just tell them about Creation, follow it up by talking about what that means about God. Your kids aren't too young to give simple, but meaningful answers to these sorts of questions if you are intentional and consistent about it. I am often blown away by the answers that Clara gives to simple God questions and observations she makes about stories. It's not hard, it just takes a little intentional thinking.

Deuteronomy 6 gives an example of a parent responding to a child's question—a situation we're all familiar with. Or it's reacting to a situation that comes up, whether that's an accident you pass on the road, or a sibling being mean, or some sort of disappointment or duty. It's about taking any and every situation with your children and turning it into a conversation that can point them to God.

You aren't doing this to shove it down their throats, you're doing it because God truly is the center and purpose behind everything. And by making Him a constantly reality, you are showing your kids how real He is. When God discussions are relegated to church, we subtly teach our kids that God only exists on Sundays but doesn't really fit into the real world.

TT - Think about your family rhythms (which is everything). What are opportunities in your rhythms to have spiritual conversations with your kids?

Tips

Now the question is, how do we do this? I think there are a lot of bad methods out there that stem from a belief that our kids cannot handle it. This is false. Yes, we must learn to teach them at their level, but to use immaturity as an excuse for negligence is foolish. So here are a couple tips:

First, be honest. Speak at a level they can understand, but do not ever lie to your children about God.

Second, like Deuteronomy 6 showed us, speak from your experience of God. Sharing your testimony doesn't always mean giving your whole life story, but it means showing that this is real to you. But you can't give your kids what you don't know. In fact, this is one of the underlining themes of this entire class: you cannot give your kids what you do not have. If you are not pursuing a life after Christ, then you can't teach your kids to. If you aren't asking questions and growing in your knowledge and understanding of God, then you'll hit a point that you can't help your kids with that either. It's kind of like that

moment that your kids hit a math class that is too advanced for you, for some of us it's calculus, for some of us it's 7th grade. Do your best to not let that happen with spiritual matters!

But when it does happen, when your kid asks a question that catches you off guard or you're not sure how to answer, never blow it off or lie. Feel free to say, "That is a big question and an important question. Can I think about the answer and get back to you?" This is not weakness, this is not letting your kids down, this is being wise and showing your kids that their questions are important. But you have to make sure that you *do* get back to them. If you tell them you're going to answer their question, don't be relieved if they never bring it up again, be intentional, be proactive in getting the answer to them.

Respond, don't React

But this brings us to an important point—we all have topics that we are terrified our kids will ask us about, topics that when we sense them coming up we desperately try to turn the conversation or say 'let's watch something!'. We need to look those fears in the face, we need to be prepared. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:15 to always be prepared to make a defense and give a reason for your hope. This doesn't just have to be true for those in the world, this is absolutely true for your kids, who are equally searching and seeking and curious.

TT - What topics are you afraid that your kids will ask about?

(Don't be embarrassed: 1. We're all struggling together, 2. We all have things we're not ready for. That's why we're here together in this class and this isn't just a book you're reading, because we need each other's wisdom and support. I need your wisdom and support.)

A passage I came across recently that gave me a great deal of confidence in this is Luke 12:12. Jesus is talking to His disciples about having a witness of the gospel before the world. He talks about being dragged before counsels and questioned, which I think is sometimes how it feels when our kids ask us questions, right? He says, "Don't be anxious about what you will say, because the Holy Spirit will teach you in that moment what needs to be said." I think this absolutely applies to talking to our kids. Pray and prepare and trust that God will give you the words. You don't have to be a seminary professor, you just have to be willing to learn and willing to trust God.

V. CONCLUSION

Here's what I want you to learn today: As parents, God has placed you in your kids lives to teach them how to live in the world. Most importantly, He has placed you in your kids lives to learn how to know and follow Him. Be proactive in engaging your children in developing their worldview and faith, don't passively leave this in the hands of pastors, other Christians, or, worse, the world around them. Your kids will learn a worldview, do everything in your power to ensure it's the one you want them to have.

Conversations are one of the biggest ways to do this. Whether in response to a question or a situation, or engaging your kids with questions about their worldview: talk to your kids about this stuff. This also means that you need to be growing in these areas yourself.

Read books, listen to podcasts, ask questions! Just because you're old doesn't mean you're done learning.

VI. HOMEWORK

Now, for your homework. This week I want you to have at least one spiritual conversation with each of your kids. This means a conversation about worldview, spiritual disciplines, a sin issue, telling them a God story—and following up by talking about what it means. Be intentional about talking to your kids and shaping their worldview so that it has room for YHWH.

VII. FURTHER RESOURCES

Lastly, I want to share with you a list of resources that I have found incredibly helpful, but I also know I don't have the full list by any means. I love books, so if you have a topic that you want help exploring and understanding, please reach out. There's good odds I've read something about it, and if not, I'd love to!

DQ - Do any of you have resources that come to mind that you have found helpful?

Pray for wisdom and the truth of the Spirit.

SESSION 2 | OVERVIEW

Goal: For parents to be comfortable engaging in spiritual conversations with their children as a means of discipleship

Text: Deuteronomy 6:20-25, Psalm 78

Exegesis:

A) Moses uses an example of a child asking a parent about their God-rhythms to show how we can use God's story in our life (our testimony) to point them to God. We should be wrestling with our history in God and continually growing so we can both set an example for and give answers to our children when they ask us the hard questions.

B) Psalm 78 reveals the importance of telling the stories of God found in Scripture to our children. We also see the responsibility placed on parents to verbally communicate the things of God. This means we should be growing in our understanding of these things as well.

Discussion points: What topics are you afraid your children will ask you about? Talk about a meaningful spiritual conversation you have had in your life and what made it impactful for you. What are opportunities in your regular family rhythms that you can engage your child in a spiritual conversation?

Practical Takeaway: Parents must be proactive in engaging their children in developing their worldview and their faith, instead of leaving it in the hands of pastors, other Christians or, worse, the world.

Homework: Have at least one conversation with each of your kids this week about an aspect of their spiritual life (this could be a conversation about worldview, spiritual disciplines, sin issues, and other related topics).

Suggested Resources: *Living in a Gray World* by Preston Sprinkle (LGBTQ issues), *10 Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* by Donald Whitney, *Parents Guide to Top 10 Dangers Teens Face* by Arterburn & Burns (a bit dated - 1995)

SESSION 3 | WORSHIP AT HOME

I. OPENING

10-15 minutes to arrive, then announcements and prayer

II. RECAP

Homework check

Last week's lesson - Using conversations to disciple your kids, shape their worldview, tell them stories of God. Family Rhythms - this will prepare us for this week's discussion, which is Worship at Home.

III. EXEGESIS

A. Deuteronomy 6:10-15

Open your bibles to Deuteronomy 6...again. *Deuteronomy 6:10-15*. Like the passage we read in 20-25 last week, this passage finds itself within the same context of verses 4-9, and specifically verse 4. YHWH is our God, and He is God alone. Nothing else competes with Him. Moses tells us to love Him with all we got and to shape our lives around this love and worship of God, teaching our children.

Now understand, Moses is delivering this message to a homeless people. Sure, they have places to sleep, but they are wandering, nomadic, in search of their home. What's worse is they know where home is, they just haven't quite gotten there yet. However, these people of Israel are on the cusp of entering into the home, the new land that God has promised to them. And what's more, they're not entering into a blank slate. Look at what Moses says in verse 10: cities you didn't build, houses that you didn't have to fill, cisterns you didn't dig, vineyards and groves you didn't plant.

But he warns them in verse 12, "be careful that once you have settled in and are full and satisfied, that you don't forget where all of this came from." Moses seems to understand the human tendency to take things for granted. Even when we're set free from slavery, we're upset that we don't have things we want. Then, even when we have the stuff, we're not thankful for it.

The warning continues: It is YHWH God that you shall fear, your work and purpose shall be for Him. Don't get distracted by the gods of the culture around you, remember they are no gods.

Again, when God gives us all the things we want and we have it easy, it is still easy to forget him, we still need to be intentional in reminding ourselves to worship God. This is so significant because for many of us our prayer life or our Christian devotion revolves around God making our lives easier. We're reminded here that even if you had nothing bad in your life, if you had no sicknesses or worries to pray for, you'd likely forget to pray.

Because, yes, God has blessed Israel by establishing them with wealth and provision in the midst of enemies. But while they are living well in the culture, the gods of the culture

are still around. God may have been the one to place them in a Canaanite home, but the Canaanites around them are still worshipping that which is not YHWH God.

Hopefully you're starting to hear the comparisons between this warning to Israel and the world we live in today. If you're not, I'll spell it out for us:

God has blessed *all* of us richly. There is no one in this room that is unbelievably destitute. We live in America, in houses, we're wearing clothes, we had the option of breakfast whether we chose to take it or not. We are in this huge and beautiful church building in which we can freely worship. Yes, we have hardship, that's part of life in a fallen world order, but God has blessed us richly.

Leah and I go through spurts of home projects where we'll do a bunch of stuff all at once and then leave it alone. We're just letting the land rest. Recently, however, we went through one of these bursts of activity, painting walls, replacing fixtures, etc. I was putting in a new light fixture in our bathroom this week and realized, I'm proud of myself for putting this light on the wall (not just a lightbulb), but I didn't run electric to my house, I didn't build this light fixture. We asked the internet please if we could have a new light if we gave it some money and it obliged. We didn't build our dining room table, we didn't grow the food in our kitchen, we didn't light the fire to heat our house—the furnace does that. And, yes, sometimes our furnace wants to take a nap instead of work, but even then, I can call someone to come out and “fix” it. I live in a home I didn't build, eating food I didn't grow, driving a car whose functions I couldn't begin to explain, and yet somehow I can look around and pat myself on the back, thinking, “go me.” How much do we take for granted? How often do we take God for granted?

How often do we worship the gods of our culture? If we stop worshipping at the idol of money, which is supported by the idol of success, which is fueled by the idol of busyness and hustle. Not to mention the idols of pleasure, of relaxation, of numbing. I do not by nature roll uphill to God, I by nature trip downhill to the gods created by man.

This is why I need this warning, and why I'm guessing you do, too.

TT - Take a few minutes at your tables, what are the gods of the people around us that we can easily worship instead of God? Maybe think about some of the seemingly innocuous ways this worship plays itself out.

Guys, this is so hard. I remember when I worked at camp and being miserable because I had no home, no place, and wishing desperately for it. But I also remember relying more heavily on God than I ever have in my life. The point isn't that we intentionally make our lives harder, because God wants to bless us in our obedience and faithfulness to Him. The question this morning is what are rhythms we can create to help our kids not inadvertently worship the gods of culture rather than the God of Creation?

B. Joshua 24:14-15, 27

Flip in your Bibles to the next book, Joshua. We will be in *Joshua 24:14-15*.

This is kind of like a fast forward past all the battles and struggle to settle into the land and sitting on the other side where Israel has moved into those homes that God gave them. In fact, verse 13 is a direct call back to what we just read. So basically, we look at this verse and say, “we got the things God promised and that Moses warned us about, how we doing?” The answer, for now, is “meh.” Basically the people are about to move in, so Joshua throws up another warning for them.

He says, like Moses, “Fear YHWH God and devote your life to him faithfully and sincerely.” Make the point of your life to serve YHWH. But there’s more, he says, “don’t fall for the same trap your parents fell into, don’t get lured into the ways of the gods of the people around you.” And if you look around today and decide that, you know what, you’d rather serve the gods of the world, you’d rather join the hustle than find rest in God, then by all means, go for it. (Joshua’s old at this point so he can get away with saying whatever he wants.) But then he says that famous line, that line that is maybe on a plaque in your home, that was definitely on a sign in my grandma’s bathroom growing up, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Mic drop, get out of there.

I love this because what Joshua is doing here is taking ownership of his family’s faith. Joshua isn’t saying, “I’m going to keep following God, and gee, I hope my kids and the rest of my family do too.” No, he is staking a claim that it will be the focus and purpose of his home to follow and serve YHWH. Have you made that commitment? As a parent, as a couple? Is it your focus and goal that you will do everything in your power to make sure your household serves the Lord? This isn’t the same thing as saying, I’m going to make sure my kids go to church and Christian school and hope other people can show them what being a Christian is like. This is taking ownership of your family’s habits, rhythms, and focus and saying, we’re going to follow YHWH, even when it makes us look weird to our friends, even when it is hard, even when the gods of the people around us sure look enticing. We’re going to follow YHWH.

Let me ask you a question: Is it possible to call yourself a Christian and serve other gods? Is it possible to go to church and not be living your life for God? I hope you say yes. Jesus Himself says, “Not every who calls me Lord, Lord will find themselves part of the Kingdom of God.” Let’s be intentional and careful and take ownership of our family’s faith. Stop at nothing.

How do we do this? How do we take ownership of our family’s faith? What did Joshua do? He had to have a plan. He wasn’t just hoping and wishing. How do we follow the Deuteronomy 6:7 mandate to make God the focus of our homes, and not just our churches?

TT - We’ve asked this question before in a slightly different way and context, but it’s a question worth repeatedly asking. Discuss at your tables “What regular rhythms can you instill in your family to help them worship YHWH instead of the gods of culture? What reminders can you set in your home to continually point your family back to God?”

IV. FAMILY WORSHIP

A. Explain

This morning I want to give us a practical rhythm, something we can and should all do with our families. I want to equip us with a simple, practical, historical, and deeply significant practice—Family Worship.

If you're like me, the phrase Family Worship might be weird. I didn't grow up practicing this regularly, and it actually was one of those phrases that I would have thought was for weirdo families. Like, your family reads the Bible together? Bummer, dude. But believe it or not, young Josh was quite wrong.

Show of hands, who in here practiced family worship or family devotions? That's great! Now we can mean any number of different things by that, so this morning I want to give you a simple how-to for what this can and should look like for your family. After we walk through what I mean by this, I want to give you an explanation for why I think this is a significant practice, why this is something that can answer the questions we just asked about how to center our family around the worship of God and not the gods of the world.

Family worship is simple in practice, it's: Read, Pray, & Sing. Simply Read the Bible together, Pray together, and Sing together. You can remember that, right? If you're taking more than 10 minutes to do this, you're doing more than you need to and likely making both yourself and your children miserable. Unless you have an awesome family, in which case, you should probably be teaching this class. But for the commoner in here, don't expect this to be a daily hour of preaching and worship. This is meant to be simple and repeatable.

Read.

So, first, read the Bible. Yes, you can and should read other books to your kids: Narnia, the Hobbit, Winnie-the-Pooh, but you need to read the Bible. This isn't a devotional, although again, those have their place. This is the Bible. I recognize that might be intimidating for some of us because if we're being honest we don't read the Bible for ourselves. That's okay, start where you are and grow. That's why we're doing this, not because we're already perfect, but because we're admitting that we need to change rhythms in our lives.

So when I say read the Bible, I don't mean rip off a whole book in one sitting. Read based on your audience. If you have younger children, stick to narratives, and shorter narratives. We still use Sally Lloyd-Jones' *Jesus Storybook Bible*, it's perfect for this, and it's profound. It makes me cry sometimes when I read it. The older your kids get, read to them straight from your Bibles, but again, I'd advise you to start in narratives if that's where they are, and as they grow work on getting through the whole Bible together. Read no more than a chapter, if that much.

The purpose for this isn't to win a race or memorize the whole thing. For the purpose of Family Worship you are finding time to center your family around the Word of God. And

read it well, for goodness sake. Don't read it like you're reading the phone book aloud. Read enthusiastically and interpretively.

Also, this isn't the time for a sermon, which I realize is a great relief to some of you and perhaps a disappointment to others. If the story is pretty straightforward, leave it there. Maybe take a sentence or two to explain what was just read. Take a moment to expound on a key verse. It's like the spiritual conversations we talked about last week, just telling them what you thought was significant is way better than having a long sermon. Or, even better, ask them what stood out to them!

Pray.

Next, pray. Pray based on what you just read. Have everyone say a simple prayer about what you just read or just pray yourself, but pray. We start by coming around the Word of God, then we pray in the presence of God. Again, I recognize that some of us in here are not comfortable praying. Can I kindly and pastorally say, you need to be. This is your Father we're talking about! Learn to talk to Him! I think we get nervous in front of others because we're afraid we'll sound stupid or say the wrong thing. Can I politely say, "You really won't"? If you are genuinely talking to God, using words correctly, and speaking genuinely, you're saying the right things. Please don't hear me say that you should feel ashamed if this is difficult for you, I'm just saying it's time to drop the excuses and learn to pray.

I've put this book up as suggested reading and gave a few away last week, but *Praying the Bible* by Don Whitney has been one of the most profound books for my prayer life. Start there. I'm sure there are a bajillion other resources. Ask someone to teach you. Because if you, the parent don't know how to pray, how are your kids going to learn?

Sing.

Lastly, Sing together. I get this can be an awkward one, and if you're going to skip one of the three, let it be this one. But, then again, don't. There is something about singing praises to God and teaching your children to sing. You don't have to get out the ol' family guitar, but you can. You don't have to hit 3-part harmonies, but I'm sure you could. Just sing. It can be a different song every time, it can be the same song for a week to learn it. Just praise God.

That's all there is to this: Read God's Word, Talk to Him, and Praise Him in song. You're not crafting a lesson or building an order of service. Simply gather together, read from the Bible, pray, and sing. It's almost too simple, but that's the point. Let's banish the idea from our heads that worshipping God is some convoluted process. We are simply responding to God as a family.

Here's why I think this is significant: this is a daily reminder to your whole family that you are a family who worships God. Like Joshua and his family you are standing up and saying "we will serve the Lord." You're heeding Moses' warning in Deuteronomy 6 and taking care lest you forget the Lord your God. Are there other ways to do that? Sure! But why wouldn't you want to take time every day to worship with your family and pray with them and hear from God together?

B. Group Practice

C. Guidelines

Now that you've seen how simple it is, let me give you a few guidelines to help tear down some of the barriers that keep us from practicing this.

Brevity

First, be brief. Don't let this get tedious. Seriously, if you're spending more than 10 minutes, you're likely doing more than you need to. The point is to have a consistent, daily reminder to your family Who's you are.

Consistency

The second point is like the first, be consistent. Try your best to have a regular time every day, maybe it's right after dinner, maybe it's right before bed, maybe it's in the mornings or right when you get home from work. I know that evenings already feel far too short and that we already struggle to fit in everything we want to with homework, housework, not to mention projects, or even just wanting to relax. However, if you follow the first point about brevity, there is no reason not to find time.

Be flexible. Consistency is important, but don't be so rigid that you break the thing. Whatever it takes, find time every day as a family to worship the Lord.

I want these first two points to kill the **Myth of Busyness**. Now, this isn't to say that your busyness is a myth. Trust me, I believe you have a lot going on. The myth is that you are not in control of your schedule or time. In the surveys you filled out I asked you to say whether you felt like your families were busy. This isn't because I expected there to be vast differences, I fully expected you to say that you are busy! You have kids for goodness sake! But, again, the myth is thinking that you have no control over your entire schedule. It's hard to find time, it's hard to say no, it's hard to disappoint people (especially ourselves), but I believe one of the most prevalent false gods in our culture is the god of busy. The god that says you have to keep up or you're going to fall behind. This plays itself out in so many areas: work, kid's sports, our clothing, the appearance of our homes, whatever it is we are believing the lie that says "if I stop I'll die." It's just not true. If nothing else, let Family Worship teach your family the beauty of stopping and resting together in God's presence.

Everybody

This brings me to my next guidelines: gather the whole family. Joshua said, "As for me and my house, except my teenage son because he really doesn't want to and I don't like his attitude right now." "As for me and my house except for my mother-in-law who's living with us, because she doesn't count." As for me and my house except the 2 month old because they're sleeping." There are any number of excuses to exclude people, but think about it this way, is there someone in your house that you don't care if they know the Lord? I can imagine that parents of teenagers or dreading the idea of this because, let's face it, hell hath no angst like a teenager that doesn't want to do something. Here's the reality, you're their parent, you are responsible to disciple them in the ways of God. This is maybe where what we said last week about Spiritual conversations comes in. Instead of huffing and puffing back, talk to them, ask them why they don't want to do

this, explain to them why it's important, show them that you genuinely care. Their soul is too important to leave out of Family Worship.

Engage

Lastly, and this might eventually help with the last point, engage others in the process. Dad's Paul is clear that final responsibility rests on you, but good leaders engage others, delegate to others, empower others. Don't be that dictator dad who has to have the final say, and don't be that lazy dad who doesn't want to do anything. Be the godly dad that you were made to be, who loves and cares and listens. Who teaches his children to pray and listens to them pray with a smile because what could be more beautiful than hearing your child talk to your Father? If you have a wide range of ages, have one of the older kids read or pray. Have a different person pick the song every night. It's Family Worship, engage your family.

TT - This is going to be our challenge this week, and it will be a challenge. It will require carving out time, convincing a spouse or child that it's worthwhile. Swallowing pride or laziness. At your tables: What barriers do you foresee having to overcome as you implement this practice with your family? And at your tables, if you have advice, that's great, but listen, pray, support.

V. CONCLUSION

Here's what I want us to take away from this morning: As we've been saying for the past two weeks, your family rhythms, your habits and routines and how you interact and live out your daily lives says a lot about what's most important to you. What's most important to you says a lot about what god you worship. God has blessed us all deeply, let's not take that for granted, let's not let the comfort of our culture allow our kids' souls to slip away. Find ways to center your family rhythms around God, and do so with Family Worship. Is this a cure-all, a magic formula? Absolutely not. But it's a critical practice for daily remember as a family Who's you are. Give your children the gift of worship in the home.

VI. HOMEWORK & OTHER RESOURCES

Your homework this week is pretty straightforward, and honestly, the hardest yet. I want you to commit to making time for Family Worship every day this week. I had some folks tell me that's not realistic, I don't care. If you aim for less, you'll hit even less than that. If this is important, why not dive in headfirst? Take today to talk about it as a couple, consider your weekly and daily rhythms and figure out how you can best worship as a family this week. I'm looking forward to hearing how this goes. Books all around for those who nail it on this one!

Pray that we would take the bold step to worship as families.

SESSION 3 | OVERVIEW

Goal: For parents to understand the importance of and learn how to practically implement Family Worship into their family's routine.

Text: Deuteronomy 6:10-15, Joshua 24

Exegesis:

A) Moses tells the people to make the topic and discussion of God a regular part of their household rhythms. They are to discuss God while they are regularly out and about living everyday life, but also while they are around the house. Family Worship is a way of establishing regular teaching and focus of God.

B) Moses warns against the idols of culture that sneak in through comfort and a lack of spiritual vigilance.

C) Joshua calls the people of Israel to take ownership of their family's faith and worship and to set witness (reminders) in their homes of their commitment to God. Family Worship is one practical way to regularly remind families that they are God's.

Additional Teaching: We will learn and practice how to conduct Family Worship by dedicating 15 minutes per day to simply: Read, Pray, & Sing. Read the Bible (appropriate to the age of your children), Pray together, and Sing one song. The specifics can change, but what matters most is the intentional, regular gathering around God's word and presence.

Discussion Points: What is the purpose of worship? How did you learn to worship God? What do you do to teach your children to worship God? Based on your rhythms and what your family spends time regularly doing, what would an outsider say you worship?

Practical Takeaway: Regular Family Worship is a practical way to center your family's life around God and continually point your children to Him day-in and day-out.

Homework: Commit to making time for Family Worship every day this week.

Suggested Resources: *Family Worship* by Donald Whitney, *Praying the Bible* by Donald Whitney, *Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones, *New City Catechism* (book and app) by Timothy Keller, *The Biggest Story* by Kevin DeYoung, *The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross* by Carl Laferton, *Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Harrison Warren, *Family Worship Bible Guide*

SESSION 4 | FAMILY & THE CHURCH

After 10 minutes, Matt begins with Announcements & Prayer

I. RECAP

Last Week - Rhythms reveal what we worship.

Did anyone work on changing any rhythms after recognizing them as unhealthy?

Family Worship - *Homework check*

II. TEACHING

Recap.

Wow, I can't believe it's our last week already. Over the past three weeks we've looked extensively at Deuteronomy 6 and how God calls us to shape the rhythms of our lives around our commitment to Him. In fact, we see that our lives start with the fact that He, YHWH, is the central and most important Being in the universe, let alone our lives, and that we should put nothing else on par with Him.

We looked at how God calls parents to be the primary disciplers of their children. We saw this specifically in Psalm 78, Ephesians 6, Joshua 24, but it's also a background theme throughout Scripture. If you have children, it is your responsibility to teach the the fear of the Lord, not mine, not Alia's not their teachers or another Christian—yours. No one is better equipped! And no one spends more time with your kids than you do, I hope. So, God has ordered His creation in such a way that it rests on parents to train their children in how to live. This includes walking, eating, talking, and especially following Christ.

Because of this responsibility, we must create rhythms in the life of our family that shape our children and continually point them to God. This can be done through conversation, continually talking to them about the stories of God and the Way of Jesus. Those of you that have put this to practice have come to realize, I'm sure, that literally every moment can an opportunity to have these conversations, even, and perhaps especially, if it feels like you just keep having the same conversation over and over again.

We also talked last week about creating rhythms that keep our kids and ourselves from following after the gods of culture. This can be intentionally limited internet and tv time, it can be regularly giving away things you no longer need, it can be spending some of your evenings serving the poor. But we also spent a chunk of time talking about Family Worship, and how this simple practice of daily reading the Bible, praying, and singing together can bring you together as a family around the reminder that you are God's people.

For our last week, I want to discuss how we take this necessary practice of family discipleship and do it together. Because, yes, God has created and ordained you to be the primary means of discipleship in your child's life—the primary mentor, teacher, and example for the way of Jesus. But you're not alone. Jonathan Edwards, an 18th century pastor and called the greatest mind America ever produced, said in his farewell sermon,

“Every home ought to be, as it were, a little church.” This is what we’ve been talking about. Not church in the sense of a sanctuary and building and programming, but church in the sense that you are a community of Jesus people, a community of believers, which is what the church is, but on a smaller scale and you all happen to be related. But Edwards would agree that that does not mean that your family is to replace the church. This morning we are going to talk about the relationship between the *Family & the Church*.

I have 4 areas that I want us to discuss as a group: Community accountability, Community Responsibility, Community Rhythms, and Community Example.

Community Accountability

I want you to think about the context of the passages we’ve looked at over the past weeks. Deuteronomy 6 takes place in the setting of Moses addressing the people of Israel before entering the promised land. Joshua 24 is Joshua’s farewell address to the entirety of the people of Israel *in* the Promised Land. Ephesians 6 is a letter that Paul has written to the *entire* church body. What trend do you see in all of these settings? Community! None of these are one-on-one private counseling conversations, like, “well maybe you should try this in your circumstances, it might work” The world is full of parenting tips and tricks and hacks, but these teachings are not part of the buffet of parenting advice. This is written to all, and the teaching takes place in the hearing of the full community of God’s people.

This means that as you are standing in the crowd, listening to Moses or Joshua or hearing Paul’s letter read, you can look around the room and see other people receiving the same instruction. There is no anonymity, there is no “Oh, I didn’t hear him say that.” No, there is accountability in the community as those who have now been given the same charge.

Think of it like a sort of HOA for discipleship. Now I am not one of the those who is blessed with an HOA in my neighborhood, but from my simple mind understands, it’s a group that determines what the standard is for a community and then makes you pay money if your grass is too long. In the same way, the people of Israel that would have heard Moses and Joshua’s teachings were people that lived in community. Those family rhythms became community rhythms of hearing the Shema at the morning and evening prayers. There is a sense in which you are not only accountable to your own family, but to your neighbors, because a strong family strengthens the family just as a weak family weakens it.

Now put this in our context. You have all sat through this class. You have heard from Scripture about God’s intended design for you to be the primary means of discipleship for your families. I hope and pray that you have been convicted to do so, to take that responsibility in your hands, to realize that there is nothing more important than passing your faith on to your children. We are a community with the same goal in mind, the same task, the same charge, and we must hold one another accountable. Share burdens with one another, seek advice, celebrate victories, pray for one another. This is why we gather as the people of God—because we cannot do it on our own.

In your surveys one of the questions I asked was “what you look to get out of your involvement in church.” Across the board there were three repeating answers: growth, serving, and community. The question I want to ask you this morning is, “what do you mean by that?” Because those are great things, but how do you expect those expectations to turn into reality. Let’s focus down on community since that’s our topic this morning. What do you mean by community? What do you want from community? Do you want a group of people that make you feel comfortable, that look and act like you? That’s good. Do you want people who are going to hold you accountable to the Christian Life, who are going to look at your life and correct you where you need corrected, advise you where you need help? That’s a little tough, not the least of which because we frankly don’t want people in our business. But the strength of your family *is* the business of the church community.

Community Responsibility

And there’s a flip side to this as well, and that is your responsibility to the community. Do you care enough about the health of your brothers and sisters and their families to have tough conversations with them, to ask the hard questions? Or are you content just to have friendly people sit next to you in the service? As humans, we are pretty bad at doing the hard things that help us grow, which is why we need each other. So as we think about the Family & the Church and the relationship between the two, realize that the church body the community of believers around you who are working to grow in the same Christian Life and disciple their kids, is there to hold you accountable, not as an institution, but as people. And on the flip side, it is your responsibility to reach out to others and invest in their spiritual health and the spiritual health of their families.

TT - At your tables: Where do you find support and accountability within the church community?

Community Rhythms

I want you to open again to Joshua 24. Last week we looked at Joshua’s charge to the people to take ownership of their family’s faith and how we must intentionally create rhythms within our homes to do just that. After that charge, the people all together say, “Far be it for us to forsake the Lord!” And you’re like, yeah, way to go Israelites! But then Joshua says, “No, you’re not able to do what you say you’re going to do.” Geez, bummer. This is not going to go the way you think. Read with me in *verses 21-28*.

There is this whole back and forth where you just want to say, “Joshua, lay off them!” But then you realize that what Joshua knows is how fickle people are. These people think they can walk away from this exciting, emotional meeting and just rock it, serve the Lord, put away other gods, and ensure their families do the same. What Joshua knows is that people have short memories and are easily distracted and the moment they leave they are likely to slip right back into forsaking the Lord.

So, Joshua sets up a rock of witness for the people, a reminder of their commitment before the Lord. Now, that seems weird to us, but a rock would have represented

permanence, something that would stick around after them and, therefore, be the perfect reminder. This was to be a thing that as the people walk by and think *what is that big rock doing there? Oh yeah! We promised to serve the Lord! Oh no...*

So here's the question as we pull this story into our context: what rhythms do we have as a church to serve as a witness to our commitment to disciple our families? What rhythms should we have? Or does being at church sometimes distract you from your responsibility to disciple your families?

TT - So let's talk about our community rhythms at our tables. What can we do as a church community to helpfully and healthfully serve as a witness, reminder, and support for one another as we disciple our families?

Community Example

Let's talk about one more aspect of the Family & the Church, the example of the community. Open to *Ephesians 6:1-4*.

We looked at Paul's specific teaching here in our first week. How he tells children to obey their parents because it is the way God designed the world to work. This is right, this is the right order of things. He also tells parents not to stir up anger in their kids, but rather to raise them in the corrective and instructive discipline of the Lord. Parents ought to lead the household, not the children, and they ought to lead them for God, not their own selfish motives.

But again, there is something I want to us to see from the context of this teaching. Paul wrote this letter to the church and it would have been read aloud in the gathering of the church body. What is interesting is that Paul addresses children specifically, he speaks to them. He doesn't say, "and someone run down to the kids wing and tell those kids to be obedient." He says, "kids (and you can almost picture him turning to look at the kids fidgeting around), obey your parents." Paul is writing with the expectation that the children would be in the worship and teaching with their parents.

Family Worship is critical for teaching our children to worship in their everyday lives, but they also need to see us and learn from our example in corporate worship. They need to learn how to sit under the teaching of the Word. They need to learn from us how to faithfully support the church, how to praise as a body, how to *sit still*. Yes, they can and should learn all these things from children's church, but they are going to pick up so much more from watching your example. And this will help you! I won't lie, I can tend to zone out in a sermon or take the elements of worship for granted, but when Clara is in there with us I am intentional about everything and thinking what I can teach her from what we are doing together.

This is why we started doing Family Worship Sundays, where we shut down Jam City during first hour so that we can be in worship together *as families*. What a beautiful opportunity for you kids to learn by example how to worship together with other

believers. You know that your kids are always watching you, so make sure they get to see you do one of the most important things you can do.

Now, don't get me wrong, this does not mean we need to completely do away with age-based teaching like Sunday School for kids. There are some that take that approach, Voddie Baucham, for example. But the invention of age-based teaching has made learning much more effective and efficient, two very good qualities. The key is using them as resources, not as crutches.

Think about it like this: God created mankind with two legs for walking. Our primary mode of transportation is to walk. Through history we have invented several means of using our legs for for efficient transportation: bicycles, cars, airplanes. Those are all great things. But if someone loses their legs or the ability to walk, do you say, well they can still drive a car. No, even in the midst of faster and better methods of transportation, someone without legs would still be considered to have a disability.

In the same way, although age based, segregated teaching is efficient and effective and good, it is not the primary way God created for teaching your children about Him. If your kid has the best Sunday school teacher, nails it in Awana, and does every Upward sport imagineable, but they don't have you discipling them, they have a spiritual disability. The question of balance is, how do we utilize those resources without leaning on them as a crutch? What are we still doing to set an example for our kids of how to worship, how to be part of a church body?

We started out by talking about accountability to one another in Christian community, it's the same for your kids! Again, in your surveys, by and large most of you said that what you wanted your kids to get out of their involvement with the church was the example of other believers and community with like-minded friends. This is a balance we must be intentional about finding.

TT - What are ways that we as an entire church community can be intentionally setting an example and establishing a community for the next generation to learn from and find a place in?

III. CONCLUSION

Here's how I want to wrap all this up. As parents, you are responsible for the spiritual health of your child, just as you are responsible for their proper nutrition and education. However, we're not in this alone. This room is full of people in the same boat as you. We need to look to one another for support, for help and encouragement, guidance, and accountability as we take ownership of our family's faith. We need to utilize the community and resources of the church as a support.

We also have a responsibility to one another, to help each other walk this difficult road of family discipleship. Making friends as an adult is hard, but we are the body of Christ, we are a community of like-minded people who live around a rule of love. If you cannot find friendship and support in the church, we're doing something very wrong. So be that

support. Reach out to another parent, ask for prayer, ask to meet up so you can talk about your families. Let this group be more than fellow students in a lecture, let this be a body of support as we figure this out together.

Let us strive for accountability in our community and also find rhythms and habits that pull our kids into the church body, rather than giving them the message that real church life is for when they are older.

IV. HOMEWORK & RESOURCES

So I have homework for you again, although I won't be here next week to grade it. This is where we all must hold each other to account. Your homework simply is this: Reach out to another member of our church body this week and have a conversation about the spiritual health of your family. Make it a phone call, go out to lunch, do more than text. Talk about your families and consider making it an ongoing practice.

V. SERIES WRAP

Lastly, as a way of a series wrap, I want to thank you so much. I have been so encouraged by this last month with you all. What a joy it is to hear how you are taking this call seriously and gritting through the difficulty to the growth.

Before you leave, please take one of these surveys. It is the same one you filled out before, with a couple different questions. I would appreciate you filling these out and returning them to the church by March 1. That gives you a whole month to practice these things so you (and I) can get a really good grade.

My hope is to have a follow-up class in 4-6 months so we can keep this conversation alive and keep supporting one another, so be on the lookout for that, and in the meantime, guide your children to Christ and walk with someone else.

Let's close with prayer. *Pray Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

SESSION 4 | OVERVIEW

Goal: For parents to find the balance of the relationship between their family and the church.

Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Joshua 24, Ephesians 6:1-4

Exegesis:

A) Deuteronomy 6 establishes daily family rhythms for Israel, however, it also sets rhythms that the entire community would observe. As families practice their own spiritual habits, they have the example of and accountability to their neighbors who are also committed to worshipping and following God in these ways.

B) Joshua has the people of Israel make a commitment before the entire gathering of Israel. It falls on the family to disciple and commit their children's lives to God, but it is done within the accountability and support of the community. The family holds their children accountable to pursuing God; the assembly of God's people holds the family accountable to that responsibility of family discipleship.

C) Paul gives specific teaching to parents, but in the context of addressing the larger church body. This is not a private matter of counseling, this is a public and shared command that all would hear. Because of the public nature of the teaching, each member of the church would have this guideline and expectation for holding one another accountable. Furthermore, the children would have been present for the teaching of this letter, showing Paul's expectation for the children to spend time worshipping alongside their parents in the midst of the larger church community.

Additional Teaching: Four areas of the Church/Family Dynamic: Community Accountability, Community Responsibility, Community Rhythm, Community Example.

Discussion Points: Where do you find support and accountability within the church community? How can you create better opportunities for accountability within our church community? What are ways the church could support you in this pursuit of Family Discipleship?

Practical Takeaway: While it is my responsibility to disciple my children, I must look to the church body for support. I have a responsibility to the church to both seek support and give it.

Homework: Reach out to one other member of our church body this week and have a conversation about the spiritual health of your family.

Suggested Resources: *Family Shepherds* by Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith* by Voddie Baucham (esp. ch.9), *Family Ministry Field Guide* by Timothy Paul Jones, *Parenting with Kingdom Purpose* by Ken Hemphill (esp. ch.8), *The Parent Adventure* by Rodney & Selma Wilson

APPENDIX 4

RESULTS FROM PRE- AND POST-SURVEYS

This appendix contains the mean scores for each question from both the pre- and post-surveys, followed by the change in mean. The survey uses a six-point Likert scale containing the following answers (the score is in parentheses): (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Somewhat Disagree, (4) Somewhat Agree, (5) Agree, (6) Strongly Agree. Each question ending in “[RS]” is meant to be reverse scored, meaning the most desirable answer was “Strongly Disagree,” while the least desirable answer was “Strongly Agree.”¹

¹ The reverse-scored questions are Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, & Q7.

Table A1. Family Discipleship Perceptions scores

Question	Pre-Survey Mean	Post-Survey Mean	Change
Q1. I prioritize consistent family worship times in my family's schedule.	3.2	5.1	+1.9
Q2. I would like to do regular family devotions or Bible reading in our home, but my family is too busy for that right now. It will probably be that way for quite a while. [RS]	4.0	5.0	+1.0
Q3. The church is where children ought to receive most of their Bible teaching. [RS]	5.0	5.0	0.0
Q4. When my children spontaneously ask a biblical or theological question, I really wish that my child would have asked a minister or other church leader instead of me. [RS]	6.0	6.0	0.0
Q5. I want to do whatever it takes for my children to succeed in certain sports or school activities—even if that means my family is too busy some weeks to eat meals together. [RS]	5.0	5.0	0.0
Q6. Parents, and particularly fathers, have a responsibility to engage personally in a discipleship process with each of their children.	6.0	6.0	0.0
Q7. Church leaders are the people primarily responsible for discipling my children and teaching them to share the gospel with others. [RS]	6.0	5.0	-1.0
Q8. My church has helped me develop a clear plan for my children's spiritual growth.	4.0	4.0	0.0

Table A2. Family Discipleship Practices scores

Question	Pre-Survey Mean	Post-Survey Mean	Change
Q9. Other than mealtimes, how many times in the past <i>week</i> have I prayed aloud with any of my children?	5.0	5.0	0.0
Q10. How many times in the past <i>week</i> has my family eaten a meal together with television, music, and other similar media turned off?	5.0	5.1	+1
Q11. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I read or discussed the Bible with any of my children?	5.5	5.9	+4
Q12. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I discussed any biblical or spiritual matters with any of my children while engaging in day-to-day activities?	4.9	5.2	+3
Q13. How many times in the past <i>month</i> has my family engaged in any family devotional or worship time in our home?	3.4	5.7	+2.3
Q14. How many times in the past <i>month</i> have I talked with my spouse or with a close friend about my children's spiritual development?	3.6	4.5	+9
Q15. How many times in the past <i>year</i> have I intentionally participated with one or more of my children in witnessing to a non-Christian or inviting a non-Christian to church?	2.1	2.3	+2
Q16. How often in the past <i>year</i> have I discussed my children's spiritual development with a church leader?	1.9	2.5	+6

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING PARENTS OF WASHINGTON HEIGHTS BAPTIST CHURCH IN DAYTON, OHIO, TO BE THE PRIMARY DISCIPLES OF THEIR FAMILIES

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This project's purpose was to equip the parents of Washington Heights Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, to be the primary disciplers of their children. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of Washington Heights and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of four passages of Scripture (Deut 6; Josh 24; Ps 78; and Eph 6) to show that God has ordained and intended the family to be the primary means of discipleship in the life of a child, while mandating the people of God to come alongside in support. Chapter 3 observes contemporary work in the area of family ministry to show that for family discipleship to be successful, families and churches must adjust the way they interact with and support one another. Churches must come alongside parents instead of taking their responsibility; parents must show their children that devotion to God encompasses every area of life; and regular worship must happen both at home as well as in the congregational setting. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficiency of the project based on completion of the specific goals. Ultimately, this project seeks to equip parents with the resources and confidence to disciple their families in the ways and life of Jesus Christ.

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